

THE INVESTIGATORS in

THE CASE OF THE RADIO SHOW SCANDAL





in

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OF THE
RADIO SHOW SCANDAL**

The Three Investigators are live on air on a radio talk show hosted by the famous host, Kevin Anderson. Callers from all walks of life get to talk to Jupiter, Pete and Bob about their experiences in past cases. Everyone is enjoying the conversations until an anonymous caller joins the show and issues a puzzling message to the host. He is stunned and reacts strangely to the message. The investigators soon learn that there are more messages of this sort as they take on this case to uncover the mystery.

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in
The Case of the Radio Show Scandal

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Die drei ???: Rufmord

(The Three ???: Character Assassination)

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1. *Late Night with Kevin Anderson*

“And here he is again! On Air! America’s hottest talk show on the radio scene—*Late Night with Kevin Anderson!*”

The voice of the announcer was underlaid with a rocking theme song. About ten million Americans were listening to the show at this hour, which had been at the top of the popularity list for several months. It was exactly 11:10 pm.

The radio host sat with headphones in front of the microphone at the broadcasting desk and waited for the director to give him the cue. He was sitting opposite Kevin Anderson, but in the control room next door, which was separated from the on-air studio by a sound-proofed glass window.

The last bar of the signature melody ended with the hard chord of an electric guitar. Then the director gave the agreed signal.

“Wonderful that you have tuned in again, dear listeners. From wherever you are watching this programme, from your bathtub, your sweaty bed or from the loony bin, tonight I have here three studio guests who should have been in bed long ago at this late hour instead of answering your curious and hopefully interesting calls. Also as always, you have the opportunity to call live to the studio and talk to my guests.

“Today’s topic is ‘Mysteries of all kinds’... and these words can only refer to a trio whose main occupation is to get to the bottom of mysterious things. Tonight live in *Late Night* are three young detectives, better known as The Three Investigators! I’d like to welcome Jupiter Jones, Pete Crenshaw and Bob Andrews.”

As agreed before the show, the radio host gave his guests the floor with a wave of his hand.

“Hello and welcome! I’m Jupiter Jones and frankly I’m a little nervous.” The First Investigator adjusted his headphones. “For despite all the routine we have acquired over the years as a detective team, this show is a first of its kind for us. Never before have we been a guest on a live radio interview.”

“A unique opportunity for you guys to kick start your company’s advertising drum to attract new clients.” Kevin Anderson smiled. “Other companies spend a fortune to get a spot on our highly sought-after commercial breaks—for just a few seconds. And you have almost an hour at your disposal—free of charge!”

“Actually, we have enough cases,” Pete, the Second Investigator, threw in and moved a little closer to the microphone at the radio host’s signal. “And we can’t complain about boredom. On the other hand, we are, of course, always curious to see what cases our clients will bring to us in the future.”

“With this, you certainly want to make it clear to our listeners that you are not fundamentally averse to a new tempting assignment. Perhaps you would even give priority to a particularly exciting case over a more unspectacular assignment...” Kevin Anderson looked around curiously.

The Second Investigator reacted to the question with a shake of the head, which seemed to amuse the radio host.

“You’re not on TV, boys! There’s no camera coverage here. The audience can only hear you. So gestures are not enough. A shake of the head is as meaningful as a politician’s campaign promise—zero! But maybe you should introduce yourself first.”

The Second Investigator got a red head. “Hi, I’m Pete Crenshaw. And like my friend and colleague Jupiter, I’m fairly inexperienced with live interviews.”

“Coming back to your question on priority, I must answer with a clear ‘no’,” Jupiter took the answer. “Every case we handle is considered top priority.”

“Nevertheless, it can happen that we have several cases in progress at the same time,” Bob said. “By the way, I’m Bob Andrews and I’m the third guy in the bunch.”

“That’s interesting.” The radio host flipped through his papers on the table, searching. “Because like any professional business, you have a business card. And the text on it raises some questions for me.” Mr Anderson seemed to have found the card, which was attached to a piece of paper with a clip. The card said:



He took the card off the page and read the words to his audience. “To stay with you for now, Bob. Does ‘Records and Research’ mean that Jupiter and Pete only gave you the part of a secretary? It sounds to me like you have to do the tedious office work, while the First and Second Investigators devote themselves to the action... or am I wrong?”

Bob remained calm. “Everyone on our team has equal rights, Mr Anderson. The reason I’m not listed on the card as an investigator is because my leg was in a brace when we started our business. I couldn’t get myself out of that quickly. As a result, I could not move as fast as Pete and Jupiter. And so we agreed that I would be mainly responsible for keeping the records, while my two friends would be on the heels of the suspects. That often involved daring and reckless chases.”

“But after Bob got rid of the brace, he was considered a full investigating member,” Jupiter affirmed. “Since then, we’ve mostly been going on investigations together, but we have decided to retain the original designations.”

Kevin Anderson took a critical look at the business card. “And what do the three question marks mean? Do you have doubts about your own abilities.”

“The thing with the question marks was Jupiter’s idea,” Pete explained.

Jupiter took over the explanation: “In addition to its meaning as a punctuation mark, the question mark is also considered in general language use as a universal symbol for an unanswered question, an unsolved riddle, an unexplored mystery. This is why we have chosen it as our logo. We try to solve every puzzle that our clients bring to us. We can’t guarantee success, but we can promise you that we’ll do our best.”

Kevin Anderson was impressed. “Well, that sounds very professional. And you even have a motto that says ‘We Investigate Anything’.”

“If it smells of mystery somehow, yes.” Bob took a sip from his Cola glass. Slowly, he felt the initial nervousness leave him. The more he and his friends chatted, the looser the

atmosphere became.

“As I understand, you’ve been in this business for several years now and have solved nearly a hundred cases. What has been your most exciting and dangerous case to date,” Kevin Anderson asked.

“Tough question.” Jupiter frowned. “Every one of our cases was interesting. I think I’m going to have to pass on that one. What do you say, fellas?”

“Same here, Jupe,” Pete continued. “When I think back on some of the cases we have had, it still makes my hair stand on end. It is impossible to call any one case the most spectacular.”

“What are you doing these days?” continued Mr Anderson. “Can I assume you have a case in progress?”

“I’m sorry, Mr Anderson,” explained Jupiter, “but what our clients entrust to us, we always keep to ourselves. Confidentiality is the number one rule for a successful detective agency.”

The radio host sensed that The Three Investigators really did not let themselves be seen so easily in the cards.

Before the show, they had already agreed with him and director Nicholas Hamilton not to disclose any in-depth details of their business life. The show should mainly deal with mysterious and interesting incidents from old cases.

Long before the show, Jupiter had eagerly discussed with Pete and Bob whether they should accept the invitation to the radio talk show *Late Night with Kevin Anderson*. The First Investigator had been sceptical from the beginning. Jupiter had been a child star of the TV series *The Wee Rogues*. But after he was recognized and approached more and more often by spectators on the street, he soon left the TV business. His fame as ‘Baby Fatso’ wasn’t pleasant for Jupiter at that time. In the meantime, he had luckily fallen into oblivion in this role. And that, in his opinion, should remain so.

Among other things, Jupiter had made it a condition for his participation in the radio show that not a word should be said about *The Wee Rogues*. He hated to be in the studio spotlight again and had finally only given in because Pete and Bob were very enthusiastic about the invitation of the radio station and expected a lot of publicity from the show. For days, the two had talked to him and finally outvoted him. And now he sat here at the broadcasting desk and was plagued by restlessness. Then the ringing of the telephone tore him out of his thoughts.

“And here comes the first caller.” Kevin Anderson made a sign to the sound engineer in the control room. The caller was put through.

“This is *Late Night with Kevin Anderson*! Who do I have on the line?”

2. An Old Client

“Agawam, Miss Agatha Agawam,” whistling it into the headphones of those present. “Am I on air?”

Jupiter’s expression brightened. He had recognized the voice of the caller immediately. “Man, I don’t believe it! Miss Agawam! What a surprise!”

“You know each other?” Mr Anderson intervened. “This will interest our listeners. Where are you calling from, ma’am, and how do you know my studio guests?”

“I live in Los Angeles and will be grateful to The Three Investigators for the rest of my life. Without their help back then, I think I’d still be doubting my sanity.”

“Can you explain that in more detail?” asked the radio host.

“I am a writer of children’s stories. More precisely, of fairy tales and fables. Perhaps someone might have read one of my books to you when you were a child. The most famous one was called *Feast of the Gnome Kingdom*. In those days, children could not get enough of these stories. Barely a week went by without me inviting all my gnomes, elves and dwarfs to tea.”

Kevin Anderson paused for a moment. “What do you mean?”

“You heard that right,” Bob said to the radio host. “When we first visited Miss Agawam some time ago, we were greeted at the garden gate by a small sign that said: ‘Please ring bell. Gnomes, elves and dwarfs, whistle.’”

“You haven’t forgotten,” Miss Agawam remarked enthusiastically from the headphones.

“What was that all about?” Mr Anderson enquired.

“That’s what we had asked ourselves at first,” Jupiter began. “But after we entered Miss Agawam’s house. There were many children’s photographs on the walls. Most of them had a dedication on them—‘Sincerely to Miss Agawam’ or something like that. Also, right next to the door was a shelf full of books that she had written herself. I noticed a few titles in particular, such as *Seven Little Gnomes*. From this, I concluded that she must have written a lot about such fantasy creatures and that she probably called her little readers from the neighbourhood gnomes, elves and dwarfs for fun.”

“All due respect,” praised Mr Anderson. “But where did it all end up? Miss Agawam had a case for you, didn’t she?”

“That’s why I’m calling. My stories used to be read a lot and I made a lot of money from them. Of course, that was a long time ago—many years before The Three Investigators were even born. But back then, children often came to visit me and asked me to autograph their books.”

The radio host threw a nervous look at the clock. “I hate to interrupt you in your flow, ma’am, but you have to make it quick. There are a lot of other people waiting on the line who would also like to have a few words with my guests.”

“You’re right,” the old lady apologized. “In this day and age everything has to happen quickly. Although I had been writing about gnomes all these years, I wasn’t prepared to see them suddenly in the flesh. But that’s exactly what happened.”

“Short version, please,” the host urged the caller to hurry.

“Normally, I have a very sound sleep. But sometime around midnight, I woke up and heard a strange noise. It sounded like someone digging deep underground. I got up, went to the window, and that’s when I saw them outside in the garden. Four tiny gnomes jumping around—little men dressed in black leather. They were playing leapfrog in front of my house and doing strange dances. I opened the window and called out to them. And then they vanished! But they came back the next few nights as well. One of them even broke into my cellar—with a pickaxe!”

“And that was when the time had come for you to enlist the help of The Three Investigators,” Kevin Anderson pushed the conversation forward.

Miss Agawam’s voice leapt with enthusiasm.

“You cannot imagine with what professionalism Jupiter, Pete and Bob have solved this clever case! Without The Three Investigators, I would probably be sitting in a retirement home for a long time. Because you can imagine that this story made me doubt my sanity.” The old lady stopped speaking for a few seconds. “Come and visit me again,” she finally suggested. “I’ll bake you a cherry pie. You certainly still have a sweet tooth, Jupiter, haven’t you?”

Pete had to laugh involuntarily. “If only you can see Jupiter now, ma’am. I put your mind at ease—everything’s still the same! But don’t put too much icing on the cake, or our friend here will burst.”

“I will remember,” the lady whispered while Jupiter ran red with anger. Ever since he could think, he had been struggling with serious figure problems. Nothing seemed to be able to change that. Besides detective work, eating was his great passion.

After Miss Agawam hung up, Kevin Anderson turned back to the audience.

“If you too would like to exchange a few personal words with The Three Investigators, do not hesitate and pick up the phone. Three times the eight, twice the four and three times the nine! With a bit of luck you will be connected with Jupiter Jones, Pete Crenshaw and Bob Andrews live on this show! We’ll be right back! Now we have some hot music for you! A disco firecracker from the seventies which is still going strong today. This is *I Feel Love* by Donna Summer.”

At Kevin Anderson’s signal, the sound engineer in the control room turned off the microphones. Then the radio host took off his headphones and signalled The Three Investigators to do the same. “We can speak freely now, because while the music is playing, the microphones are off.” He stretched his legs under the table far away from him. “Well, still have stage fright?”

“Not a chance,” Pete replied. “The call from Miss Agawam was a knockout! I really didn’t expect that.”

Jupiter took a look through the glass window into the control room. “There must be hundreds of listeners calling in, Mr Anderson. Is there actually a specific procedure for screening the callers to your show?”

“Sure! Mrs Brighton is responsible for that. She sits upstairs in the telephone room and selects in advance, the most interesting people for us to talk to.”

“And how does it work?” Bob wanted to know.

“We even have calls coming in two hours before the broadcast,” Mr Anderson explained. “You can’t imagine all the people calling. Only a fraction of them are serious. Most of them are just jokers who want to tell silly jokes or give greetings to their friends and relatives. And then there are also a lot of callers who want to use my show to spread nasty slogans and messages.”

“That’s incitement of the people,” Jupiter told his two friends. “But how does Mrs Brighton manage to distinguish and screen such calls from the serious ones?”

“Gloria, that’s Mrs Brighton, has a short conversation with the callers beforehand.” explained the radio host. “Thanks to her many years of experience, a professional like Gloria can tell after just a few sentences whether or not the caller really has something to say on a particular subject. Although there is no such thing as one hundred percent certainty, our Gloria almost always get it right. Hopefully this will continue to be the case in the future. Good luck, Mrs Brighton.” He knocked three times on the wooden table.

Meanwhile Jupiter pinched his lower lip and looked the radio host straight in the eyes. Until today, he had only known Kevin Anderson as a voice from the radio. But when the radio host now sat opposite him in person, he was very impressed. The First Investigator admired the professional talent with which the radio host captivated the listeners. He was very curious to see what other surprises the show had in store.

3. The Mysterious Caller

“And now I get a signal from the director that the next caller is already waiting on the line! Hello, hello, who is this?” With a skilfully casual voice, Kevin Anderson greeted the next listener.

“This is Connie Mable,” it came over the speakers. “I’ve read so much about The Three Investigators and I was wondering if they ever had a case in the works that was so tricky they couldn’t solve it?”

“An interesting question, Connie. But before I pass it on to The Three Investigators, why don’t you tell me how old you are and what you do in your spare time?”

The caller giggled sheepishly. “I’m eleven years old and I’m in the fifth grade of Beverly Hills High School.”

“Eleven years old?” the host asked. “And you’re not in bed at this hour? What do your parents say, Connie?”

The girl lowered her voice to a whisper. “Actually, I should be asleep by now, and I’m already in bed. But on my bedside table is a portable radio. And I listen to your show every night—unfortunately only very quietly, otherwise my parents would hear it. I don’t think they’d find it funny.”

“But how can you use the phone when you’re already in bed?” Kevin Anderson enquired curiously.

“I have my own phone in my room. Since I heard in the preview yesterday that Jupiter, Pete and Bob would be guests on your show, I almost burst with excitement! I’ve been on the phone for two hours now and my fingers are sore. And now I’m really getting through!”

“Tell me briefly about your hobbies, Connie, then I will connect you live with The Three Investigators,” the host tried to heat up the tension.

The caller thought for a moment. “I like to read detective and horror stories. And then I like to go to the movies with my friend. We especially like movies that are not recommended for our age—horror films and crime thrillers. That’s cool!”

Jupiter, Pete and Bob could not help but grin.

“That sounds good!” Even Kevin Anderson had to smile. “Let’s hear what my studio guests have to say, Connie.” With a hand signal he handed over the conversation to The Three Investigators.

“Hi, Connie!” One after the other greeted the caller.

“This is Jupiter Jones!”

“Pete Crenshaw!”

“And Bob Andrews!”

“Madness! I can’t believe it! I read all about your cases in the papers. One thing struck me...” Here Connie took a short break. “Please don’t take it amiss, but you can’t be as smart as you are. I mean, you’ve had successes that only Sherlock Holmes could have. How do you do it?”

“What do you see a problem here?” Jupiter asked arrogantly. He did not like it at all when someone doubted his knowledge and his powers of deduction.

"I don't have a problem with that," the girl replied confidently. "But Sherlock Holmes is a character in a novel. You, however, are real. I can understand that the heroes in a made-up crime novel must always succeed in catching the culprit otherwise the reader would feel cheated. But the stories are fictional and the author has enough possibilities to lay out traces and weave in evidence. But in real life, it's different. How can it be possible that you succeed in every case?"

Bob looked at his friends in irritation and cleared his throat. "First of all, I want to tell you that we are thrilled to have such a fan like you on the line, Connie! And you can believe one thing—as much as I would like to give you a plausible answer to your legitimate question, I can't explain it either. Sometimes clues just happen to fall into our hands, and other times a huge portion of luck helped us."

"But we owe most of it to the intelligence of Jupiter. With his help, we have often let the culprit fall into a trap that finally caught him," Pete said in praise of the First Investigator.

"And how do you get interesting cases?" asked the caller curiously. "My friend and I once opened a detective agency. But except for the boring assignment of a fool whose tomcat had disappeared, nobody wanted to assign us to a case."

"A job is never boring," Jupiter said in a cautionary tone. "It's the little things that seem insignificant that lead to the trail of greater mysteries. Recently we too were given the task of tracking down a runaway cat. When we took a closer look, we came across an ingenious scam. We never dreamed of this in the beginning. But to answer your question—we've solved every mystery there is. And the recipe for success behind this secret is ultimately quite simple—never give up, never let up and always look twice. For often, things are not what they seem at first."

"You can't really explain it any better than that," Kevin Anderson joined the conversation and urged a hurry. "Connie, I hope that your questions have been clarified and that you continue to tune in to *Late Night*. But now the next caller is already waiting in the queue and we are all curious who it is this time!"

Without waiting for an answer, the telephone conversation with Connie was aborted and the radio host greeted his next listener effusively.

"Hello, hello, who have we here? This is *Late Night with Kevin Anderson*!"

"Mr Anderson?" it came over the speakers. "This is Mathilda Jones!" The Three Investigators looked at each other in astonishment.

"I am Jupiter's aunt and, to be honest, I don't agree with my nephew and his two friends constantly exposing themselves to danger by playing detective games. Fortunately, everything has turned out well so far, but how easy it is for something terrible to happen to the boys! Could you talk them out of this? Our salvage yard is piling up. It would make a lot more sense if the rascals here would stand by me instead of shadowing unpredictable criminals. I didn't realize the extent of their questionable hobby before this show."

The radio host grinned. "I fear you are preaching to deaf ears, ma'am. I believe that The Three Investigators seem to be more interested in mental challenges than physical ones. I'm afraid I can't help you with this. If you are interested in getting support staff for your business, our station offers a regional job placement service. Maybe you should try contacting us tomorrow! I wish you a good night!"

Then the connection was terminated. The Three Investigators held their bellies in laughter.

"Splendid!" squealed Pete. "You saved the day!"

"We will now take a short commercial break," Kevin Anderson told the listeners. "But we'll be back in a few minutes, and we look forward to your calls! So please stay tuned."

The sound engineer in the control room then put on some advertising jingles, while the radio host and his studio guests took off their headphones for the next few minutes.

In the meantime, a fast food chain, a CD sampler with the latest hits of the year, a hair shampoo with cola aroma and an alcoholic mixed drink in a spray can were advertised. When the last jingle about a hazelnut candy bar sounded, Kevin Anderson asked the three guest to put their headphones back on.

“And here we are again with *Late Night!* This is Kevin Anderson, and already we have the next caller on the line! Hello, hello, who is this?”

“Just call me ‘Mystery’, Kevin,” whispered a dark male voice from the speaker.

“Thirteen, fourteen, seventy-eight. You know who makes you great!”

Jupiter startled. He noticed a nervous twitch at the corner of Kevin Anderson’s mouth. The radio host wanted to reply, but not a single sound came out from him.

4. Emergency Brake

The First Investigator reacted with lightning speed to bridge the silence that had arisen between Kevin Anderson and the anonymous caller.

“Hello, hello, who is speaking?” Jupiter imitated the voice of the radio host in a skilful tone. But instead of an answer, only a faint click sounded. Apparently the caller on the other end of the line had hung up.

“A joker whose jokes have long since passed their use-by date,” commented Bob dryly.

Kevin Anderson nervously brushed a strand of hair from his face. “This incident is proof that we are truly live on the air, ladies and gentlemen. I can only hope that the next caller has something more interesting to say.” He took a quick look over at the director who gave the signal that the next caller was already waiting to be put through.

In the further course of the show, some listeners and former clients of The Three Investigators called. The late-night show went by in a flash and before they knew it, the red light above the studio door, which was on during the show, was gone.

Kevin Anderson took off his headphones hastily and went purposefully into the control room to the director Mr Hamilton. Jupiter remained seated at the broadcasting desk with his friends, never letting the radio host out of his sight.

Through the glass window, he could see Anderson gesticulating wildly and loudly to the director. The door to the control room was ajar and The Three Investigators could hear every word.

“What’s that old bitch up there getting paid for anyway?” Mr Anderson became furious. “If she’s no longer able to do her job properly, she should leave as soon as possible!”

The director shook his head firmly. “Don’t get upset, Kevin! What can Gloria do about it? I bet my beard that she’s been deceived maliciously once again!”

“Damn!” The radio host angrily clenched his fist on the mixing board. “If this happens again, I’ll throw her out myself!”

Jupiter, Pete and Bob pricked up their ears with interest.

“Before you tear up my studio further, we’d better let Gloria have her say.” Mr Hamilton pushed the button on the intercom. “Gloria, come on down here. We’re having a little discussion.”

“My, my,” Pete whispered to his friends. “I think we’re in for some serious trouble.”

“Quiet!” hissed Jupiter. Clearly there were quick footsteps in the corridor approaching the studio.

Shortly afterwards, the door opened. Without even giving The Three Investigators a glance, a chubby woman hurried into the control room and left the door open behind her as well.

“What were you thinking putting that joke on my show?” Kevin Anderson stood accusingly before Mrs Brighton.

The elderly lady, who was estimated by The Three Investigators to be in her mid-fifties, dismissed the blame from her. “You can’t put this on me, Kevin! In the preliminary screening, this guy revealed himself to be an amateur criminologist who was working on a

difficult case that was completely overtaxing him. He wanted to ask The Three Investigators for help. I never doubted for a second that his request was serious.”

“Oh, no?” the radio host provocatively asked. “Then you have been fooled.”

“To be honest, I don’t quite understand why you’re so upset, Kevin,” the director intervened in a conciliatory way. “It is unavoidable that every now and then, we get a nuisance caller on the show!”

“But not on my show!” Mr Anderson shouted. “And besides, it wasn’t the first time! When is Gloria going to get this right?”

Only now did Mrs Brighton turn around and cast a worried glance through the viewing window. “Do you have to reprimand me in front of your guests, Kevin? You could control yourself a bit.” She waved at The Three Investigators with a tense smile. “I promise you, next time I’ll screen the callers even more critically. After all, that’s all I can do.”

Pete looked at his two friends in astonishment. “I don’t understand why he’s so upset. The phone call wasn’t that bad.”

Kevin Anderson seemed to hear every word. Quickly, he joined The Three Investigators in the on-air studio while Mrs Brighton scurried past him out the door.

“The phone call wasn’t bad, Pete, but it was disturbing,” he explained. “I’m a professional, and my *Late Night* show achieves high ratings. I cannot afford to have any troublemakers messing with my presentation. After all, we are broadcasting live and I don’t want to change that in the future. Besides, Mrs Brighton has often put me in touch with idiots in the studio whose only goal was to insult me in the most primitive way possible. I am extremely popular, but some listeners do not seem to allow me to do that. Envy is still the greatest enemy of success!”

“Nevertheless, the words of the anonymous caller were basically harmless,” Jupiter emphasized once again.

“It has nothing to do with the matter as such.” Kevin Anderson approached the table and grabbed his papers, which he rolled up in one quick motion and tied with an elastic band.

“But maybe you’re right,” he added quietly. “I am tired and irritated. The past few days have been quite stressful. We had to constantly change the programme topics because the chief editor fell ill at short notice and her deputy is not a great organizer. Maybe that’s why I react so sensitively.”

“It’s all right,” Bob relented. “It’s really none of our business but I really enjoyed the show.”

Pete was beaming. “I can only agree with that. I hope my parents didn’t miss recording the show. I’d like to listen to it again. What about you two? Do you feel like it?”

“No chance, Pete!” Yawning, the First Investigator took a look at the watch. “It’s well past midnight, and I’m tired!”

“I’m about to get my butt kicked too.” Kevin Anderson rubbed his tired eyes. “Shall I call you a taxi, boys?”

“Thank you, that’s nice,” Jupiter said. “But Pete is here with his car. I’m sure he’ll drive us home.”

“Was that a polite request or a badly disguised order, Juve?” Pete asked pointedly.

The First Investigator grinned broadly. “Neither... It was rather a fervent wish that I hardly dared to express!”

A few minutes later, Pete steered his MG from the car park of the station. A light drizzle set in. The Second Investigator switched on the windscreen wiper and drove towards the exit at

walking pace. “*Late Night* was a complete success, don’t you think? The strongest calls came from Agatha Agawam and Aunt Mathilda.”

“Did we make a fool of ourselves?” Bob asked.

“What makes you think so?” Pete replied indignantly. He narrowed his eyes to be able to look better at the road. The windscreen wipers of his car were no longer fully functional and left a greasy film on the windscreen.

“Well, at first we got into stammering a few times,” Bob said, “especially when Mr Anderson tried to find out about our clients, against our agreement, but Jupe reacted very well to that.”

The Second Investigator looked disturbed to the left and then to the right. “At the moment, I have lost my sense of direction. Wasn’t the exit on this side?” He drove the MG along an endless looking hibiscus hedge and slowed down. “Who’s going to find their way around this maze of car parks? I’ve seen that one-way street sign before. I feel like I’m going in circles!”

“Then turn left here and go back a short distance. You should have taken the second exit.” Bob took a small sponge out of the glove box and wiped the fogged-up windscreen. “It’s pouring rain now. Luckily we’re nice and dry.” He looked in the rear-view mirror at Jupiter. “What about you, Jupe, you’re not saying anything.”

“I’ve been thinking, fellas.” He pinched his lower lip nervously.

“Let me guess, Jupe,” smiled Pete. “You can’t get this anonymous caller—this Mystery—out of your head. Am I right?”

The First Investigator leaned forward a bit. “Mystery’s phone call was actually pretty irrelevant to me. What I found more striking was Kevin Anderson’s reaction to it. Didn’t that surprise you?”

“At first,” Bob agreed. “But I think his explanation is reasonable. When you’re down in the dumps, you can lose your patience... especially since that call was neither funny nor imaginative. It was just plain crazy and stupid!”

“Right. What was the point of that?” Pete added. “If it were up to me, I’d have the audience—”

With a horrified outcry, Pete suddenly jammed on the brakes. Then something hit the bonnet with a violent bang.

Bob was the first to break free from the paralysis. He undid his seatbelt and pointed to the windscreen with a trembling hand.

“I think... you hit someone!”

5. Mrs Brighton's Views

Pete and Bob jumped out of the car with great presence of mind.

"Why, that's Mrs Brighton! Oh, my goodness!" The Second Investigator reached for her arm. "Are you hurt?"

"I... I'm not sure," the old lady stammered. With slow movements, Mrs Brighton slipped off the bonnet and tried to stand on her feet. She breathed a sigh of relief and wiped the rain-soaked locks of hair from her face. "I believe I am unharmed. I guess I had a guardian angel."

"Can you stand up, ma'am?" Jupiter enquired anxiously. He had climbed out of the back seat of the car and picked up her handbag, which lay in a puddle right in front of his feet.

Mrs Brighton had also been frightened to death. She rubbed her leg and smiled bravely. "Nothing broken. Nothing knocks an elephant down that fast. How can I walk across the road without looking right or left! This heavy rain is to blame. I had forgotten my umbrella and wanted to reach the covered bus stop as quickly as possible. Now I am wet to the skin. But it's still better than being taken to hospital injured." She palpated her arms and stepped on her feet again to check. "I am unharmed. You have nothing to worry about!"

Jupiter held her handbag out to her. "Do you have far to go?"

Mrs Brighton waved away. "A stone's throw. I live in Inglewood—just out of Hollywood. The bus takes me right to my front door."

"But it would be an honour for us to drive you there," Jupiter replied politely.

"I accept your invitation with pleasure." Mrs Brighton gave Pete her address and sat next to him in the passenger seat.

"This rain! I could have called a taxi, but I was too cheap to do so," Mrs Brighton said. "Besides, I thought a little walk would do me good. I was really annoyed."

"You're probably talking about Mr Anderson's outburst of anger in the studio," the Second Investigator carefully said.

He started the engine and steered the car at walking pace across the car park towards the exit gate.

"That's right," Mrs Brighton ranted. "How dare that big-headed fellow confront me in front of you and the director—as if it was my fault I was taken in by that caller!"

Jupiter cleared his throat. "Judging by your expression, you and Kevin Anderson do not exactly have a good working relationship. Has something happened before or why can't you work well together?"

"Actually, I do not like to speak ill of my colleagues." Mrs Brighton snapped open her purse and took out a small pocket mirror. She used it to check her make-up, which had run a little under her eyes from the rain.

"I've been with this radio station for thirty years. And you can believe me that in that time I have worked with far greater personalities than Kevin Anderson. I'm talking about talented actors and presenters who really had something to say—not the kind of shallow stuff Mr Anderson makes up every night. But success has obviously gone to his head. He thinks he's the greatest late-night entertainer and seems to mistake his co-workers for slaves.

"It's about time that the fans get enough of his cheeky remarks and the ratings of *Late Night* sink back again. Then he will hopefully realize that he too, is just a flesh and blood

human being who has no right to treat others like dirt.

“Kevin Anderson has made a lot of money with his success with *Late Night*. Certainly several million dollars have already accumulated in his account. Since then, he thinks he’s better than everyone else.”

“You were talking about the ratings,” Bob followed up with interest. “What did you mean by the ratings of *Late Night* sinking back again? Was the show a failure at first?”

“A flop across the board!” Mrs Brighton said with disdain. “When Kevin went on the air a year ago with his late-night show, most listeners switched to other stations after only a few minutes because his presentation was lifeless and bored the audience to death. You should have heard that. It was dreadful.”

“But something must have changed,” the First Investigator speculated. Intrigued, he watched as Mrs Brighton skilfully repaired her eye make-up with the help of a small make-up box.

“Indeed,” she continued. “I think it was after the tenth show that Kevin Anderson gave himself a new image. The previously unsuccessful host suddenly got a rather loose mouth and tackled topics in his show that other people wouldn’t even touch with sausage tongs. There were heaps of protests, especially from older listeners who found Kevin Anderson’s sometimes raunchy style a thorn in their side. The telephone ran hot, the letters of complaint piled up on the director’s desk and the press had a field day. You can guess where it all led to...”

“Quite clearly,” Pete concluded as he turned onto the highway. “Everyone tuned to *Late Night* to follow the scandal live... and the ratings went up automatically.”

“Kevin Anderson’s easy-going manner is especially appreciated by the youngsters. Eighty percent of listeners are under twenty,” added Mrs Brighton. “And this fact is generating enormous advertising revenue for the station. Most advertising companies are not interested in the generation over fifty. The young people your age, on the other hand, can be sold many products. You’re still flexible and always open to try something new. This is exploited ruthlessly by the advertising strategists.”

“My initial enthusiasm for Mr Anderson had already waned during the show,” the First Investigator skilfully directed the conversation back to the radio host. “I noticed that his casual remarks were not as spontaneous as I had previously thought.”

“What do you mean?” Pete wanted to know. His eyes were focused on the road.

“Didn’t you notice that he read lines off the paper? No spontaneity whatsoever.”

“It’s no big secret.” Vainly Mrs Brighton examined the results of her make-up in her little pocket mirror before putting it back into her handbag. “Everyone at the station knows he works with crib sheets. He probably suffers from such severe stage fright that without this aid he would not be able to say a single coherent sentence!”

“Nevertheless, it is a mystery to me why this caller upset him so much.” The First Investigator did not let up. “Has this Mystery person ever called the show before or was it the first time?”

In surprise, Mrs Brighton turned her head to the back seat.

“Didn’t you know? Last week, Mystery already had her first performance. Why do you think Mr Anderson was raving about it tonight?”

“Frankly, we don’t sit in front of the radio that often,” Bob honestly said. “But what do you mean by ‘her’ performance? Mystery is clearly a man, at least as far as I can tell from his voice.”

“When you talk about tonight’s show, I have to agree with you. But last week, the voice was unmistakably female. Her call reached me at 11:30 pm, in the middle of the commercial

break. The theme of the show was ‘Drugs in the Workplace’.”

“What kind of topic is that?” Pete asked amused. The heavy rain shower had subsided so that he could step on the accelerator harder again.

“It doesn’t matter now, Pete,” Jupiter replied impatiently, fearing that Mrs Brighton would not be able to complete giving them the relevant information by the time she arrived at her front door. After all, they had already passed the Inglewood town sign a distance away. “Proceed, ma’am.”

“What can I say? Actually, I’ve had enough callers on hold already. But the woman seemed very upset. She told me that her daughter had come home from school and had told her with complete enthusiasm that her maths teacher had come to class tipsy, and that he had been slurring his words in front of the class.” Mrs Brighton swallowed. “In retrospect, I can’t believe I bought her story, but the caller sounded so convincing. She said that it was a scandal that had to go public. Then I decided to put her through, especially since my task is to select topics that can get us high ratings.”

“And then what happened?” The First Investigator played nervously with his fingers on his belt.

“She whispered a strange phrase into Mr Anderson’s ear.”

“Can you remember the exact words?” Bob asked.

Mrs Brighton closed her eyes for a moment. ““It is I... Mystery... It was the nightingale... and not the lark.””

Pete cut in. “That was it?”

She nodded.

“And how did Mr Anderson react to that?” urged Jupiter.

Mrs Brighton suddenly pointed out the side window. “This is my stop.”

Involuntarily, the Second Investigator stepped on the brakes.

“React?” Mrs Brighton unbuckled her seat belt and frowned. “Actually, not at all. Funny you should ask me that.”

“Why?” Jupiter asked himself.

“Because I didn’t recall it until just now.”

“What?”

Her hands gripped the handbag. “After that call, he had several blackouts.”

“What do you mean?”

“He was unfocused and seemed to be out of his mind. He also got stuck several times during conversations with subsequent callers. I never seen him like that before.” Mrs Brighton pulled the handle on the car door. “It was nice of you to drive me home. Perhaps we’ll meet again sometime.”

“Just one more question, ma’am!” Jupiter held her back.

“Yeah?”

“Did Mr Anderson make such a fuss after that show as he did today?”

Mrs Brighton shook her head. “He was quiet as a mouse. I’ve seldom seen him so. He seemed completely absent. I couldn’t figure out what was behind it... But one thing I know for sure—since that mysterious phone call last week, he’s been feeling really bad. I can see that clearly.” A smile played around the corners of her mouth. “And to be honest, I’m enjoying it...”

6. Cold Showers

The rain pelted down on the roof of the old mobile home trailer. It stood on The Jones Salvage Yard, owned and operated by Titus and Mathilda Jones—Jupiter’s uncle and aunt. They had looked after the First Investigator after his parents died in a plane crash many years ago. Since then, the First Investigator could not imagine a life without his surrogate parents.

The discarded trailer served as the headquarters of The Three Investigators. It contained everything that was necessary for their investigations—from a telephone answering machine, computer and fax machine to a small darkroom for photo development. Over the years, The Three Investigators had collected many useful equipment. Meanwhile, the trailer was bursting at the seams. Nevertheless, the boys felt so comfortable in it that they almost considered it their second home.

And also that evening, they had gathered here to listen to the recording of the last *Late Night* show on audio cassette. It was already 10:10 pm, and Pete impatiently urged Jupiter and Bob to finally press the start button of the player.

“All day long you’ve been surfing the Pacific Ocean, Pete, and now you’re putting us under time pressure,” the First Investigator criticized with an accusatory undertone. “Tomorrow is Sunday, we can sleep in. So what’s the hurry?”

Pete pointed to the wall clock. “In exactly one hour, Kevin Anderson will go on the air with today’s *Late Night* show. If we listen to yesterday’s recording now, we can also listen to the live show that follows. Who knows, maybe Mystery will call again today.”

“You don’t believe that yourself!” Bob took a quick look out the trailer window. “It’s horrid weather out there, and it doesn’t look like it’s gonna stop raining any time soon. So I don’t have any objection to that. Let’s sit back in our chairs with a Coke and listen to what we got on the radio yesterday!”

“Agreed.” Jupiter took three bottles of Cola from the fridge while Pete started the cassette.

“And here he is again! On Air! America’s hottest talk show on the radio scene—*Late Night with Kevin Anderson!*”

Although The Three Investigators already knew the show, they sat in front of the player with pricked ears and listened to their own conversations. Finally, Pete pulled a grimace on his face. “You can tell me whatever you want, but I think my voice sounds awful!”

“Same here, Pete.” Bob slipped around on the chair, uncomfortably. “I think only Jupe is taken with his own voice. Isn’t that right, Jupe?”

Jupiter nodded benevolently. “You also didn’t need to doubt your self-confidence, if you knew why.”

“Watch out, Bob,” joked Pete. “I’m sure he has another scientific explanation for this.”

“Of course!” Jupiter nodded and leaned back relaxed. “Most people react disappointed and disturbed when they hear their own recorded voice. Your own voice from a recording sounds very thin, while we perceive other people’s voices as normal.”

“And why is that?” Pete asked emphatically.

“The reason is that we have a false perception of our own voice. We hear it with our ears, but only part of the sound reaches the ears through the air. The deeper tones in our voice are

heard within the head, because these tones spread from the larynx to the neck and facial muscles and especially the jaw and skull bones directly to the eardrums.”

“And what does that mean?” Bob went into it.

“Our ear infers from these deeper tones that our voice has a great sonority. However, other people hear our voice without these low frequencies. In other words, they hear our voice like that coming from a recording. But this does not mean that one’s own voice is really thinner than that of other people. When they listen to their recorded voice, they feel the same as we do, or rather, as you do.” Jupiter grinned triumphantly.

“Great,” Pete said sullenly. “Even with this knowledge, I still find it strange listening to my own voice.”

Bob also wanted to make a comment when Jupiter raised his hand in warning. “Quiet, fellas! Here comes the call from Mystery.”

When The Three Investigators listened to the words of the unknown caller again, a deep wrinkle formed on Jupiter’s forehead. After Mystery hung up, he pressed the stop button on the audio player with a firm grip.

“Did you just have one of your famous brainstorm or why are you turning the recording off?” Bob dryly said.

“Mrs Brighton was right. Even acoustically, you can hear Mr Anderson’s shirt flapping.” Jupiter pressed the rewind button and replayed Mystery’s call. Again he stopped the recording. “The usually so eloquent radio host suddenly couldn’t get a word out. ‘Thirteen, fourteen, seventy-eight. You know who makes you great!’ How can that upset him so much?”

“The verse makes no sense to me at all,” Bob had to admit. “Perhaps there may be a connection between Mystery’s first and second call.”

““It was the nightingale, and not the lark...”” mumbled Jupiter. “I know that quote.”

“You’re not the only one who has read William Shakespeare, Juve,” Bob beat him to it. He theatrically rolled his eyes and gracefully brushed his hair. ““It was the nightingale, and not the lark,” he whispered in high-pitched tones. “It’s from *Romeo and Juliet*. The couple comes from two noble families, between whom there is a great dispute. Nevertheless, the son and daughter fall in love and meet secretly at night.”

Pete raised his eyebrows. “And what is that quote about the nightingale?”

“One night, when Romeo is sleeping illicitly with his adored Juliet, he is suddenly startled by a nightingale singing its song,” Bob continued. “Romeo breaks free from the arms of Juliet because he believes the lark is already singing its morning song. He wants to hurry back so that their secret meeting is not noticed. But Juliet can reassure her lover that: ‘It was the nightingale, and not the lark’—which is supposed to mean as much as: ‘The night has not passed yet, we still have plenty of time.’”

“Wait a minute!” Pete suddenly said. “So it’s safe to assume that Mystery’s call is a love affair. Perhaps we are dealing with a woman who is infatuated with Kevin Anderson’s voice. People sometimes fall in love with celebrities, even though they’ve never met them in person.”

“That would be a motive.” Thoughtfully, Jupiter pinched his lower lip. “Then how do you explain Mr Anderson’s strange behaviour after the call?”

“Maybe the two were having an affair with each other,” Pete suggested. “Kevin may have separated from her against her will, and now Mystery plays the unjustly abandoned one who wants to get her lover back at all costs. Why else would she quote the line from *Romeo and Juliet*?”

“But how does the second call fit into the story?” Jupiter’s fingers drummed nervously on the armchair back. “The voice belonged unmistakably to a man.”

“Then Kevin Anderson might be in a complicated love triangle,” Pete said with a grin. “Gee, Jupe, do you have to smell a secret everywhere? After all, even famous radio hosts have private lives. And unless we are officially assigned to investigate this mystery, we shouldn’t bother.”

The First Investigator made an offended face and let the recording continue to run. Wordlessly, he listened to the programme and was still silent when Pete switched to the radio at 11:10 pm to listen to the day’s live broadcast of *Late Night*.

Kevin Anderson seemed to be back to normal. Freshly amused and with biting comments, he chatted easily through the programme whose topic was ‘Graffiti—Is it Art or Smear?’. It was a topic that apparently aroused a lot of interest among the listeners as there were many calls.

“And here comes the next caller,” Anderson said cheerfully. “Hello, hello, who is this?”

“Mystery...” a woman’s voice whispered.

For a second, Kevin Anderson held his breath. But this time he seemed prepared for the mysterious caller. Against all odds, he suddenly began to laugh. “Before you make another incomprehensible comment, perhaps you should explain the rules to the audience and me so that we can participate in your guessing game!”

Mystery reacted calmly and cooed like a dove:

*Roo coo coo, roo coo coo,
You absolutely have no clue!
As you’re not that bright,
Someone has to save your plight!*

There was a crack in the line. The caller hung up.

At that moment, Bob felt as if lightning struck him! Unable to move, there was a chill going down his back. He got goose pimples and closed his eyes worriedly.

“Hung up,” Kevin Anderson remarked. “Too bad. I was just starting to get used to Mystery. Maybe she’ll get back to me. I feel like music now! Then I’ll look forward to the next call... so stay tuned.”

The First Investigator turned down the knob on the radio. “Once again, Mystery provided a familiar quote, but in a much altered form. This time it is from the Brothers Grimm’s version of Cinderella... The original quote is in German, and the English version has it as:

*Roo coo coo, roo coo coo,
Blood’s in the shoe,
The shoe’s too tight,
The real bride’s waiting another night!”*

“Hey, I remember that! That’s what the doves coo after the stepsisters have taken Cinderella’s shoe.” Pete also contributed his fairy tale knowledge. “But the shoe was too small for them, so one cut off her toe and the other her heel to fool the prince. That sounds a bit more serious, don’t you think? Yet Mr Anderson suddenly takes this call with a sense of humour. Do you have an explanation for this change of heart?”

“I would describe his reaction as uncertainty,” replied Jupiter. “What else can he do but deal with Mystery in public in this way? But his acting leaves a lot to be desired. Even a layman should notice that.”

Pete crossed his arms demonstratively. “What are you trying to tell us?”

“Haven’t you noticed?” Jupiter asked. “The way Mr Anderson laughed when Mystery came up? It wasn’t honest at all. It sounded fake and artificial, more like a pathetic attempt to defy the unwanted caller.”

“But for what purpose, Juve?” asked the Second Investigator. “And why does he ask her to explain the rules of the game and call again? None of this makes sense.”

Jupiter took the last sip from his Coke bottle. “There are two possibilities. The first is that Mr Anderson is bluffing. Because if you show your fear, you make yourself vulnerable. This would mean that Mystery wants to put pressure on our radio host with her insinuations. But he’s trying to demonstrate superiority in order to take away the caller’s sense of power. If Mystery had to lay her cards on the table, she would have nothing against him anymore.”

Distraught, Pete grabbed his head. “That would mean that there’s a rotten blackmailing going on!”

“In any case, there is nothing wrong with considering this possibility. However, if we’re right about this theory, we’re not dealing with professionals.”

“What makes you say that?” Pete asked.

The First Investigator raised his index finger in a didactic manner. “Blackmail is a crime involving great risk because if the blackmailer is caught, he will face a very serious jail sentence. The judges are not squeamish about this. That’s why the perpetrators usually go about it alone. Anyone who knows about it increases the risk of exposure. But there are already three different people behind Mystery’s calls. And this triples the chance to find out about them. I wouldn’t call this a professional approach. Each chain is only as strong as its weakest link.”

“Makes sense to me. And what about the second possibility?” Pete asked interested.

“Asking Mystery to call again may also be because Kevin Anderson is not willing to get involved in the game and that he, in cooperation with the police, is taking up the trail to bring them to justice.”

“You couldn’t have said it more complicated than that, huh, Juve? But I still understand what you mean. With the help of a trap, you could find out about Mystery.” Pete scratched his head thoughtfully. “But has anyone ever committed a crime? I mean, calling up a late-night show and apparently saying stupid things is not a criminal act. Okay, the mysterious callers always didn’t give their names, but to search for them right away is a bit extreme. How would Mr Anderson explain that to the police?”

“As long as we don’t really know what the intention behind Mystery’s verses is, we can only speculate,” Jupiter said.

He put the empty Coke bottle on the table and turned to Bob. “Are you already asleep or why don’t you take part in our deliberations at all?”

“Excuse me, fellas.” Bob rose from his chair. “But I think it would be better if I were to make my way home. I haven’t eaten much today and I’m beginning to get a headache. I think I’ll go home and get a good night’s sleep.” He reached for his jacket and raised his hand to say goodbye.

“What? So suddenly? Don’t you at least want to finish the show?” Pete tried to persuade him. “It’ll be over soon anyway!”

Bob said no. “I am tired, fellas. We can talk tomorrow.” He turned around and left the trailer with a pale face.

“What’s got into him?” Pete wondered.

Jupiter shrugged his shoulders. Then he put his feet on the table and listened to the rest of the late-night show with Pete.

When Jupiter entered the trailer the next morning, the blinking of the light from the answering machine immediately caught his eye. Curious, he pressed the replay button.

“Hi Jupe, this is Bob. I’m still feeling off track today. I hardly slept last night either. I don’t think I’m gonna be stopping by Headquarters today. But I’ll get back to you as soon as I’m better. See you.” There was a crack. Then a beeping sound announced another message.

“This is Gloria Brighton.” The lady’s voice sounded disturbed and excited. “If there’s any way you can make it, come by my house this afternoon. You have the address. I don’t know how to help myself and I have a case for you. I’ll wait for your arrival. It’s urgent!”

Jupiter’s face lit up. Impulsively, he reached for the phone and called Pete.

Pete found a car park on Arlington Road, right in front of the house where Mrs Brighton lived. As Jupiter and Pete got out of the MG, the smell of freshly cut grass filled their nostrils.

“I knew I could count on you!” Mrs Brighton called out to them from afar. She was standing in the garden, cleaning the lawn mower.

Jupiter took a closer look at the outside of her house, which he had only perceived as a dark spot the night before last. The afternoon sun shone on the house and it made a modest but solid impression. The two-storey brick house was adorned with a red tile roof. The well-kept garden was surrounded by a wrought-iron fence. Mrs Brighton approached them and opened the gate.

“I almost went crazy and walked around all morning—senseless and aimless! Then I tried to distract myself with gardening. But now you’re here!” She wiped her earthy hands on the apron and reached out to the two boys. “Let’s sit down at that table over there. It’s nice and cool in the shade.”

Jupiter and Pete followed Mrs Brighton to the terrace, where the garden table was already set with a carafe of iced tea, a plate of biscuits and four glasses. Exhausted, the plump lady lowered herself onto a chair. “Sit down and help yourself! I made the iced tea and cookies myself. I await your verdict.”

Jupiter immediately grabbed it and let a peanut cookie melt on his tongue with relish. “Delicious, ma’am! My compliments!”

“I’m glad.” Mrs Brighton smiled. But the next moment, a troubled shadow fell over her face. “I thought there’d be three of you. Is Bob okay?”

“We don’t know for sure either,” Pete explained. “Last night he complained of a headache and this afternoon he cancelled our appointment.”

“Then I’m keeping my fingers crossed that he’s gonna be all right.” She poured the iced tea and handed them the glasses.

“But now to you, ma’am,” the First Investigator mentioned the reason for them coming. “Your message on our answering machine sounded very urgent. What happened?”

Mrs Brighton’s hands clenched in fists. “I can’t believe it myself yet, but Kevin Anderson, that devil, tricked me in the most insidious way and accused me of stealing in front of so many employees.” She could barely hold back her tears. “Last night, the station manager fired me without notice!”

“But how is that possible?” Pete left his mouth open in surprise.

“I don’t know how Anderson managed to sneak the boss’s watch into my purse. But if I find out, I’m gonna kill him myself!”

7. Plea of Insanity

Before Bob knocked on Inspector Cotta's door at the Rocky Beach Police Department, he took a deep breath. When he finally heard a hoarse 'come in', he pushed the door handle down and entered the office.

The police inspector looked up in surprise when he recognized his young visitor.

"Bob Andrews, the third member of The Three Investigators! To what do I owe the honour? Is this a purely social visit? Or are you in some kind of trouble again?"

Bob stuck his hands in his trouser pockets and stayed in the middle of the room for a moment.

"Well, why don't you sit down?" Inspector Cotta stepped out from behind the desk and went to the coffee machine. "Shall I get you some coffee too?"

Bob nodded wordlessly and sat down on a chair.

"With milk and sugar?"

"With milk, please."

The inspector handed Bob a steaming mug. "Just don't burn your mouth! I just put it on fresh."

Bob took a sip while the inspector sat back down at his desk.

"Well, what's the problem?"

"I'm not sure if my imagination has been playing tricks on me," Bob began, "and so I would like to ask you for some information."

"My goodness, that sounds exciting!" The inspector propped his chin up. "Go ahead and shoot."

"You remember Clarissa Franklin?"

"Franklin... Clarissa..." Cotta said. "Help me remember."

"She is a psychotherapist. But I should probably say—was, because after she was charged in court, she could no longer practise her profession." Bob was sipping his coffee. "I also doubt that she will ever be allowed to practise again, given the scale of her crime."

"Wait a minute..." The inspector reached for his computer keyboard and typed in something.

"Franklin... Franklin," the inspector mumbled. "Here we go—Franklin, Clarissa... Psychotherapist. What exactly do you want to know from me?"

"Can you check the police computer to see if Dr Franklin is still serving her sentence, and if so, what prison she's in?"

"In my opinion, she and her accomplice have been sentenced to several years," Cotta replied. "Prisons could be several. May I ask the background to your enquiry?"

Bob nervously tugged at his shirt. "As I said, I may be wrong, but actually I'm pretty sure I recognized Dr Franklin's voice on the phone last night on a radio show."

"This may sound strange, but it's not unlikely."

"Anyway, could you just tell me where Dr Franklin is serving her sentence? I have, well," Bob cleared his throat, "a personal interest."

"You know we can't just give out that kind of information," Cotta said, "usually."

He blinked his eye, lifted the phone and pressed a button. Bob slid restlessly around in his chair, because it took a while for the inspector to get someone on the line.

At last, his face lit up. "Cotta here! George, I need some information about a psychotherapist who we arrested some time ago. Her name is Clarissa Franklin. According to my computer, the reference of the case is 27K9/7384. I would like to know in which prison she is and how long she still has to serve her sentence. Please call me back as soon as you find out anything." He hung up the phone.

The inspector didn't have to wait long for the agreed callback. After one minute, the phone rang.

"Cotta here... Ah, George, that was quick. Well, did you find anything?"

Bob listened with interest.

"She's... not? What do you mean, she's not? ... Do you know where? ... And for how long? ... I see... All right, thanks for your trouble... See you later in the cafeteria." In astonishment, he hung up the phone.

"What is it, Inspector?"

"Well, as life sometimes plays out... Clarissa Franklin is not in prison."

Bob felt his hair stand up on the back of his neck. "But how is that possible?"

"Her attorney pleaded insanity at the trial."

"Does that mean she's free ever since?"

"After such a crime?" Inspector Cotta shook his head. "The judge agreed to Dr Franklin's request for voluntary medical treatment. Since then, she is serving her sentence as a patient in a psychiatric hospital in Pasadena!"

8. Character Assassination

“You’re not serious!” Pete gazed at Mrs Brighton in astonishment. “Kill him? You mustn’t even think about it.”

“Of course not. But in anger such words can slip out,” she justified herself. “What would you do in my place?”

“The same thing you did, ma’am,” replied Jupiter calmly. “Namely, enlist the help of experienced detectives. It’s a much better idea than jumping at Mr Anderson’s throat. We reject physical violence in any case. We usually beat our opponents with our brains.”

“Fine with me. Just make sure you teach that guy a lesson he won’t forget!” The lady banged her fist so hard on the garden table that the glasses vibrated.

“I fervently hope we have not misunderstood each other, Mrs Brighton,” Juve said. “I still assume that you want to engage us in detective work and not use us as avenging angels. As you put it—”

“Of course I didn’t mean it literally,” she said with a vengeance. “I have no intention of murdering anyone, nor do I ask you to retaliate. I hereby officially engage you to clear up Kevin Anderson’s obscure machinations and bring light into the darkness of these unexplainable Mystery calls. If you figure this out, we’ll know why that rascal had me fired.”

The Second Investigator reached for another cookie. “You mean there is a direct connection between all these incidents and you being fired?” he asked, chewing.

“I’d stake my life on it,” Mrs Brighton said confidently. “And furthermore, there is very definite evidence of such a connection. That’s why I called you all here.”

“Let’s hear it.” Jupiter stretched his legs and blinked into the afternoon sun, whose rays now slowly drifted onto the shady terrace.

“I made a grave error in telling Mr Anderson the truth last night. I had no idea that my hunch was right on the money.”

“I understand you’re upset, ma’am...” The First Investigator tried to get a clear picture. “But could you please report in order so that we can follow you?”

“I’ll do my best.” In one swift motion she moved her chair into a shady corner. “When I arrived at the station last night, Mr Anderson intercepted me outside the lift and asked to speak to me privately. At first, I didn’t think anything of it and sat down with him in the studio, quite naïvely. Then he came straight to the point and told me that he had seen from his car how I got into your car and left with you. When I asked him if there was anything wrong with that, he asked me back if I had talked to you about Mystery. And then my ears pricked up.”

“And what did you answer?” Pete asked.

“The truth—though in a toned-down version. I was just telling him that you were surprised that Mystery’s harmless utterance had literally left him speechless, and you wanted to know from me if I had an explanation for it. After this statement, he turned pale and his eyelids began to flutter nervously. He continued to drill and enquired how I answered to your question. I admitted outright that it seemed strange to me and that I would suggest for Mystery to be tracked down with the help of a trap so that the show could run smoothly again in the future. Of course, the police would have to be informed.” Mrs Brighton triumphed.

“You should have seen the look on his face. His jaw dropped. But he quickly got a grip on himself again and warned me that it was all his affair and that I should not interfere. When I turned to leave, he reminded me that I had to end contact with you immediately, as you would only bring trouble!”

Jupiter grinned confidently. “We will now inevitably give him exactly that. How did it continue then?”

“After I knew how Mr Anderson reacted to the suggestion involving the police, I decided to put a little more strain on his already damaged nerves and tried to push my idea through to the top floor with the trapping idea. My argument was that they shouldn’t let Mystery mess up the show! Secretly, of course, I wanted to find out how Anderson feared Mystery’s calls. Granted, I was also amused that this time it was him who was in trouble.

“Anderson has jeopardized the existence of several employees because in his successful position, he has the power to decide their professional future. Anyone who doesn’t pull together with him will be fired sooner or later on his instructions!”

“But on what grounds?” Pete asked indignantly.

“All we need is a few flimsy arguments,” said Mrs Brighton furiously. “Kevin Anderson is the station’s current driving force. He can have anything he wants as long as the ratings are as high as they are now!”

“Continue to tell the story in order,” the First Investigator asked her, so as not to lose the thread.

“After I suggested to my boss that he let the police set up a trap, he promised to think about it. Strangely enough, he casually asked me if I had seen his watch. He had taken it off somewhere and could not remember where. I answered ‘no’ and went back to the telephone room to answer the calls for the day’s *Late Night*. During the live broadcast there was another incident. It was Mystery’s third call. Did you follow the show?”

Jupiter nodded. “I assume that you were fooled in the same way as the two previous times, which was understandable because it was a different voice again.”

“Right,” continued Mrs Brighton. “But what do you think happened after the show was over? Again I was called into the studio and again Mr Anderson asked me to justify this mishap... again, of course, in front of the entire crew, including my boss, Mr Wilder. I’m lucky that the studio guests had already left because suddenly, Anderson’s eyes began to sparkle and an eerie silence set in.”

“I can guess what’s coming...” Pete anticipated.

Mrs Brighton has skilfully managed to imitate Kevin Anderson’s voice. “‘Oh, Gloria, you wouldn’t happen to have any idea where Mr Wilder might have lost his watch? Because we’ve all turned half the station upside down and haven’t found it.’ I shook my head and felt a strange feeling of tightness at that moment. Rightly so, as it turned out. ‘You’re not still getting into that sad habit, Gloria?’ I then asked ignorantly: ‘Could you please express yourself a little more clearly?’ He lowered his voice and answered hypocritically in a sympathetic tone of voice: ‘Do you remember when I caught you trying to steal 200 dollars from my jacket in the cloakroom? You promised me then, most solemnly, you would never do it again.’”

Mrs Brighton gasped for breath. “I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. I gave it back to Anderson hard, but he remained calm. He then said: ‘It was not so long ago that you apologized to me for what you had done and blamed it on your emotional disturbance.’ I was too horrified to react. He took this opportunity to continue his story: ‘You confessed to me then that you suffer from kleptomania—an irresistible impulse to take other people’s property. This alone was the reason why I kept the embarrassing incident to myself. Besides,

you promised to pull yourself together in the future, in case your fingertips started to tingle. It seems to me that you haven't kept your end of the bargain.'

"Of course I tried to prove my innocence and opened my handbag. Inside was now the missing watch that Anderson must have planted on me at a convenient moment. Mr Wilder gave me exactly five minutes to pack up my personal belongings and leave the station for good. Generously, he declined to press charges as I had worked for him for so many years. I swear to you, by everything I hold dear—I've never stolen anything in my life. Not even a piece of candy!"

"You don't have to assure us of that," the First Investigator assured her. "We'll take your word for it."

"You're the only ones." Mrs Brighton was on the verge of despair. "If only someone could prove something to Kevin Anderson. He wanted to get rid of me because I was bent on getting the police to set a trap. His character assassination attempt did the trick very well. Everything indicates that he is determined to hide something from the police."

"Character assassination?" Pete questioned ignorantly. "What do you mean?"

"A common term to know as a detective," Jupiter spoke with his mouth full. He had ingested another cookie. "Instead of character assassination, one could also speak of 'slander'. Anyone who knowingly spreads lies about other people is guilty of character assassination. For example, if you—"

"All right, all right, I got it," Pete tried to slow down the First Investigator in his eagerness to explain. "I'm much more interested in how we could find out more about Mr Anderson. You've got a plan all worked out, haven't you?"

Pete and Mrs Brighton looked at Jupiter questioningly.

"I'm still not sure what the first step we should take. For the time being, there are two important pieces of information I would like to ask you for, ma'am."

"I'm listening."

"To be honest, I'm surprised that you never call the callers of *Late Night* back, but just leave them on hold. If you had the phone number of the person calling you, you could always trace who the guilty party was in case of unwanted situations."

"The answer is quite simple," replied Mrs Brighton. "Cutbacks! The station saves on telephone costs at the expense of the listeners. But I'm pretty sure that this procedure will be changed soon because of what happened with Mystery. And what more do you want to know?"

Jupiter rose from his chair, clearing his throat. "Does Mr Anderson have a girlfriend or some other close friends? Or do you know if there's anybody who might be familiar with him?"

"I'm pretty sure this man has no friends. He's only interested in himself. He has even stopped contact with his family since *Late Night* brought him such success. In the past, he often called his brother after the show to find out how he liked it. No, Mr Anderson doesn't seem to be able to tolerate anyone near him since he became a star. In my eyes, he's a creep!"

"You couldn't have expressed your opinion more clearly, ma'am. So, for now, we have the most important information." Jupiter took a look at his watch. "We must leave now. I hope that you will sleep well despite last night's events. And as for Kevin Anderson, you have nothing to worry about. The Three Investigators have solved every mystery yet!"

9. Meeting an Old Adversary

Pasadena was northeast of Rocky Beach. On the freeway, Bob drove his Beetle at a remarkable speed through the dense afternoon traffic. He felt a queasy feeling in the stomach area. Nevertheless, he could hardly wait to have his suspicions confirmed.

Now he reached Orange Grove Boulevard—one of the main streets of Pasadena. This was where participants of the annual Rose Parade lined up for the beginning of the event that featured flower-covered floats, marching bands, and equestrian units.

From here, an exit branched off to the Rose Bowl—an outdoor athletic stadium. Bob had found out with the help of a city map that the psychiatric hospital where Clarissa Franklin was staying was only a few blocks away from the stadium.

He had not hesitated for a second to see the psychotherapist in person, and had already phoned the hospital to find out the visiting hours before he set off. At first, he had been sceptical whether strangers were allowed to enter at all, but the phone receptionist was very willing to give information, and that removed all his doubts.

When he passed the stadium, he could see the hospital, which had the promising name ‘Best Hope’, from afar. It was a three-storey, glazed building with a huge, lushly planted garden that almost resembled a spacious holiday home.

Bob spotted the sign ‘Visitor Car Park’ and parked his Beetle in a shady place. With soft knees, he got out of the car and walked slowly towards the entrance. Before he reached for the handle of the heavy door, he hesitated for a moment, but then he gathered all his courage, walked past the entrance and approached the reception.

An elderly man was standing there while behind the reception desk, a young woman was busy looking through index cards.

“How much longer shall I wait?” the man asked impatiently.

“Are you really sure that the patient’s last name is spelled with a double ‘S’ and ‘Y’?” asked the receptionist in a squeaky voice.

“I’m telling you,” the visitor insisted. “‘Messway’! I must know. After all, I am her father. Patricia Messway. Shall I spell it for you again?”

“No need to. Here’s the card—‘thirteen, fourteen, twenty-five’. My colleague had filed it under a wrong patient number. Room 218. You can take the lift, Mr Messway. Second floor, end of the corridor on the left.”

“Thank you, you’re very kind,” the man grumbled dismissively.

Before he could enter the lift, he had to undergo a body search by two security guards. Security seemed to be very important at Best Hope Hospital.

“Can I help you?” the blonde woman behind the reception desk asked Bob. He recognized her voice immediately. He had spoken to her on the phone half an hour earlier and asked her for information.

“I would like to visit a patient. Her name is Clarissa Franklin.”

Quickly the fingers of the woman whirled through the card index box.

At that moment, a van came to a stop outside. Two men got out and each took a large bundle wrapped in plastic from the rear. Shortly afterwards, they entered the lobby of the psychiatric hospital.

“Hi, Miss Wheeler!” One of the men called out. “We’re bringing back your cleaned gowns.”

The young woman pointed smilingly to a door beside the reception. “You can use the service entrance. Then go straight ahead to Room 17.”

“Got it.”

Carrying the bundles with both hands, the men disappeared into the long corridor.

“And now for you.” With pointed fingers, the young woman plucked an index card from the box. “Here it is. Franklin, Clarissa. Is the patient aware of your visit?”

“N... no...” Bob stammered in an unsettled voice. “It’s a surprise.”

“Then please wait.” She pressed the button on the intercom. “Monica, there’s a visitor here for Clarissa Franklin. Is she in her room?”

“She’s in the garden plucking radishes,” it came from the speaker. “I’ll come down and take the visitor to her.”

“Someone will come and take you to see her,” the girl squeaked kindly to Bob. “In the meantime, you have to go through the security check over there.” She pointed to the two guards. “And don’t forget to leave your ID card here. You’ll get it back later.”

Bob pulled out his student ID and put it on the counter. Then one of the security guards scanned his body with a metal device while the other inspected the contents of his trouser pockets. At that moment, a nurse hurried down the stairs, walked towards Bob and held out her hand.

“I am Nurse Whitney. Are you the visitor for Miss Franklin?”

He nodded. “My name is Bob Andrews.”

“All is well,” reported the security guard. “The young man may pass.” He waved him through the security area.

“Then please come.” The nurse went ahead and Bob followed her into a long, seemingly endless corridor with countless doors to the right and left. There was a strange, elusive smell in the air. Bob thought it was a disinfectant.

After about twenty metres, Nurse Whitney stopped at a glass door and pulled on its handle. “This way out into the garden.”

The two of them stepped outside and walked along a wide gravel path that led past a pond with water lilies to a small greenhouse. In front of it was an elongated garden bed. With her back to them, a woman was kneeling, busy picking radishes out of the ground and putting them into a basket.

“Miss Franklin, you have a visitor.”

When the psychotherapist turned around and saw Bob, she involuntarily closed her eyes.

“Is everything all right?” Nurse Whitney said, a little worried.

Miss Franklin rose from the garden bed. “I’m... I’m okay. I’m just surprised. I wasn’t expecting visitors. You... you can go.”

“Then I’ll leave you two alone.” Nurse Whitney walked up to a garden bench, which was about twenty metres away under a palm tree, sat on it, never letting Miss Franklin and Bob out of her sight.

A few seconds passed before Bob took a step towards the psychotherapist and extended his hand to her. “Hi.”

“Hello.”

A tense mood was in the air. Both seemed to fill this encounter with unease. Bob looked around the garden and finally pointed to a pavilion. “Shall we sit there, perhaps?”

Miss Franklin gave a heavy sigh. “All right.”

Silently, the two walked towards the pavilion side by side. As far as Bob could see, there was no other patient in the garden. Only Nurse Whitney stayed at a distance on the bench and watched their every move like a hawk.

The pavilion was only sparsely furnished. Apart from a round wooden table, around which four folding chairs were placed, there was nothing else there. Miss Franklin wordlessly lowered herself onto a chair, while her right hand pulled a lighter and a packet of cigarettes out of her overalls.

With trembling fingers, she lit a cigarette, blew the grey smoke into the air and forced herself to a cramped smile. "I expected everything, but not that we would ever meet again," she said, "and certainly not in this environment."

Bob bit his lower lip. "I must confess, I feel no differently."

He sat opposite the psychotherapist and examined her appearance. She had changed since they last met. Instead of her blonde shoulder-length hair, which she had often tied into a ponytail, she now wore a stubby short hairstyle. She also seemed to have parted with her lavish jewellery. The golden earrings, the necklace with the glittering pendant, the silver bracelet and the countless rings on her fingers were no longer part of her outfit.

The biggest change, however, was that her pale face was completely without make-up. Bob never dreamed that with the help of make-up, powder and lipstick a completely different image could be created. As she sat in front of him in her much too wide overalls, she almost made a boyish impression on him. There was nothing left of her former elegance.

"Stop staring at me!" She seemed to have guessed his thoughts. "I'm insecure enough as it is, and I'm having a hard time here. I can only hope that one day everything will turn out well for me."

"Why are you here in Best Hope? Frankly, I was surprised you weren't in prison."

"This hospital is a prison, Bob, although there is one important difference..." Her hand played restlessly with the lighter.

"Which is?"

"At the time when I committed the offence, I was not of sound mind—at least that's what the experts tell me. If I had been put in a conventional prison after my conviction, simply serving my prison sentence would not have helped me. Here in Best Hope, I have the chance to cure my illness and return to a regular life after my release."

"What kind of illness are you talking about?"

Miss Franklin nervously took a puff on her cigarette. "At that time, I was heavily addicted to pills and had a disturbed perception of myself and those around me... otherwise I would not have been able to torture my patients in such a sneaky way and cause you and your two friends this unforgivable damage. When I think about it today, I feel only remorse. I can't believe I used my hypnosis knowledge for such diabolical purposes."

In the meantime, the embers of her cigarette had reached the filter. As the psychotherapist had no ashtray at hand, she dropped the glowing residue on the tiled floor and crushed it vigorously with her shoe.

"But now I want to know something from you." She examined Bob's eyes.

"Yeah?"

"What did you come here for?"

10. Deception

Bob was in a tight spot. On the way to the hospital he had thought about all the questions he wanted to ask Miss Franklin, but he hadn't thought about how he could get the psychotherapist to confess.

Suddenly he became aware that Jupiter would never have tackled the matter so rashly. But now it was too late. He had to act.

"Well?" urged the psychotherapist. "Cat got your tongue?" She seemed to pierce him with her eyes.

"On the contrary." Bob gave himself an inner jolt but he tried to be as calm as possible. "Do you ever listen to the radio?"

"A strange question." She lit another cigarette again. "The main thing I do in this hospital is to be by myself. I want to try to find my true self again and cope with the past. The radio isn't very helpful in this sense. But every now and then, I need some distraction, I admit openly. It can happen that I switch on the box. But if at all, it's only late at night—just before falling asleep."

"Then you must be familiar with the show *Late Night with Kevin Anderson*."

"Kevin Anderson? Never heard of him. Should I know him?"

"He hosts the late-night show on AFR every night with huge success. Interesting people often call him. Three days ago, we—Jupiter, Pete and I—were guests on that show."

"Oh, really?" she reacted with surprise. "That would have interested me. Unfortunately, nobody pointed it out to me. I don't get much of what goes on outside the hospital. I haven't the faintest idea what AFR is all about."

"That's a real information gap, Miss Franklin. AFR stands for 'American Fun Radio' and it has been around for over thirty years and should be familiar even to you."

"You have to be clearer if I am to understand what you are getting at," she replied.

"Personally, that radio station doesn't mean anything to me. I would ask you to consider that I already have a few more years on my back than you. At my age, there are far more important things to be doing than listening to hip-hop sounds, going to discos and trivial radio shows. This late-night show means nothing to me, and I've never heard of a Kevin Anderson either. By the way, I know you well enough to know that there is something deeper behind your innocent question. So, put your cards on the table. What's this radio show all about? It must be a juicy business, when you are beating around the bush."

Bob became sceptical. His initial conviction slowly gave way to increasing uncertainty. Was he wrong to think that he recognized Clarissa Franklin's voice on the radio?

"Are you still listening to me?" the psychotherapist ripped him out of his thoughts. "Why don't we talk like two rational people? There's something on your mind. Come on, spit it out."

Bob tried with all his strength not to let himself be guided by his emotions. "Kevin Anderson has received very strange phone calls in his last few shows, which one can assume that the radio host is under a lot of pressure. So far, three different people have called to the show using the name 'Mystery' and caused considerable trouble in the studio. Something is going on and we're supposed to find out what's behind it."

“And what do I have to do with it? Shall I write up a psychogram of the callers, or why are you coming to see me here at the hospital?”

Bob went on the offensive. “I recognized your voice on the radio quite clearly, Miss Franklin. You were the third caller! Apparently you went to great lengths to give the voice of Mystery an eerie timbre, but I knew it was you from the first second I heard it. Your voice is very distinctive.”

“You gotta be kidding me.” Against her will, she suddenly had to laugh. But then she stopped and her features began to darken. “Do you realize the slander you have just uttered? I committed a terrible crime then, for which I pleaded guilty and for which I still have to pay with my freedom. I am here in medical care and I have to suffer the worst agonies in order to be able to live in society again some day. And here you come along just to frame me for a new dirty crime without a shred of evidence!”

Horried, Bob had to watch as red marks appeared on her neck.

“So far there has been no talk of a dirty crime.” He tried to calm the upset psychotherapist. “We are merely trying to shed light on this obscure matter.”

“Pressuring a person with hidden insinuations is a dirty crime, and most of all, illegal! I don’t have to explain that to you, lad. And anyway, you said there were three callers. If I’m one of the suspects, who are the other two? Maybe Nurse Whitney and the young girl at the reception?”

With one quick movement, she rose from her chair and stood up in front of Bob. “What a pity. I over-estimated your judgement. I thought you were quite capable of sensing whether a person was telling the truth or not. Apparently, I was wrong. Who else could I pressure in my position? I’m a psychiatric case—someone who wants to be cured by Best Hope. You have hurt me very much with your ugly insinuation,” she exclaimed in a broken voice. She struggled with her tears. With a jerk, she turned away.

Bob felt helplessness rising within himself. He now also stood up, approached the psychotherapist and carefully put his hand on her shoulder. “I... I don’t know what to say. I was sure... I was 100% sure that it was you who called Mr Anderson. I didn’t expect that reaction... I must have been mistaken.” He breathed deeply. “But if it wasn’t you, I’m at my wits’ end.”

“It’s better if you go now.” She wiped a tear from her cheek, turned around and grabbed the lighter and cigarette box on the table. “I’m going to tell Nurse Whitney to stop letting you see me. This is best for me and best for you. I have to take care of the radishes now. I think you can find your way back on your own.” She reached out her hand to him and said: “So, goodbye.”

Bob looked crestfallen. He stood in the middle of the pavilion and looked at Miss Franklin in bewilderment. Then he left the pavilion.

Nurse Whitney came towards him. “Well, that was a short visit,” she remarked in amazement.

“Whatever you say,” Bob replied dryly. “I don’t think I’ll be seen again here in Best Hope.”

“Then I’ll show you the way out now.”

“Thank you, but I can find my own way.” He quickly said goodbye to the perplexed nurse and headed for the glass door.

As Bob entered the corridor, the pungent smell of chemicals got into his nose again and made him suddenly want to leave the hospital by the quickest route. The patients and staff had probably long since got used to this smell, otherwise he could not explain how it could be tolerated here.

As Bob walked down the corridor, his thoughts revolved around one thing—his visit to Best Hope Hospital hadn't brought anything. More than that, he almost felt guilty for having insensitively offended Miss Franklin with his suspicious hunch. His surprise arrival alone had opened up old wounds in her.

Bob reached the end of the corridor and opened the glass door, when he suddenly stopped as if struck by lightning! He could not believe what he saw.

His heart started pounding like a jackhammer!

11. Unanswered Questions

Less than ten metres away from Bob, there was a man standing in front of the reception desk whom he recognized immediately. It was Kevin Anderson!

He seemed very angry. Without even taking a breath, he let a whole series of angry words rain down on the young woman at the registration desk. However, she was not particularly impressed by this.

“I’ve heard far worse swearing, Mr Anderson! Do you want me to get started? And even if you hold your breath till you turn blue, Dr Freeman won’t be back from a convention until tomorrow afternoon! If he cannot be reached at the hotel and has not yet responded to your messages left at the reception desk, you have no choice but to be patient until tomorrow afternoon and come back here again. I would like to send you to him, but he is really not here! If I could, I would like to pull him out of the hat like a rabbit and serve him to you on a silver platter, just so that you can finally relax!”

The radio host wouldn’t let up. “But I really need to talk to him! Does he have a secret mobile phone number for emergencies?”

The young woman denied. “Slowly I feel like a CD that got stuck in one place and is repeating itself over and over again. If he can’t be reached at the hotel and hasn’t yet responded to your messages left at the reception, you have no choice but to be patient until tomorrow afternoon and come back here again!”

“And what about an envelope? Why didn’t he leave an envelope for me?” Mr Anderson was beginning to get a temper tantrum. “Without that envelope, I’m lost!”

“I recommend you try again tomorrow afternoon.”

“Can I see Steven then?” The radio host now tried a different strategy. “Maybe he’s got a way for me to...”

She shook her head firmly and pointed to the wall clock behind her. “At this hour? Impossible.”

“So... I’ll be here again tomorrow afternoon.” He finally gave it up. “Okay, I’ll be here at 4 pm. Tell Dr Freeman. Don’t forget.”

“I can’t tell him until he comes back,” she replied pointedly.

“Whatever you have to do... Just tell him I have to meet him at 4 pm tomorrow.” Like a whirlwind, Mr Anderson dashed out the door.

Bob was still hiding back in the corridor. He closed his eyes and counted to ten in his mind. Only then did he set himself in motion and strolled seemingly light-footedly towards the reception desk.

“Hi, I’m back! Didn’t take too long, did it?” Bob gave the woman at the registration desk his most beautiful smile.

“I’m not surprised. It’s not a pleasant place for a teenager to be.” She reached into a compartment under the counter. “Here’s your ID back.”

At that moment, through the glazed entrance area, Bob saw the radio host drive away in a red Porsche.

For a brief moment, he had the idea of engaging the young woman in a conversation to find out about the background to Mr Anderson’s strange appearance at the hospital. But then

he decided that this approach could easily go wrong. If the radio host learned that someone here had enquired about him and that someone's name was Bob Andrews according to his ID, then he would be in big trouble. So he changed his mind, grabbed his ID and gave the receptionist a silent grin before leaving.

When he had left Best Hope Hospital, he felt an excited tingling in his stomach. He was looking forward to meeting Jupe and Pete as he could hardly wait to tell them his news.

"I don't know what to say," Pete marvelled with an open mouth when Bob told his two friends the results of his encounter in detail. Starting with his first suspicion of having recognized Miss Franklin's voice on the radio, the subsequent visit to Inspector Cotta, up to his experiences at Best Hope Hospital.

Then the First and Second Investigators reported on their meeting with Mrs Brighton.

The Three Investigators sat at Headquarters and had been discussing for two hours. Although the case of Kevin Anderson made Jupiter's brain cells steam up, he couldn't hide the fact that something was bugging him.

"Gee, Jupe, you have a face as long as a fiddle," Bob said. "What's the matter?"

"I had previously assumed that we were a team where there were no secrets between us. Have the rules changed without my knowledge? Or why didn't you tell us that you recognized Clarissa Franklin's voice? And then sneaking off to Inspector Cotta and then going to Pasadena alone into the lion's den! What has got into you?"

"Now, hold on there for a minute," Pete interrupted. "If there was any one of us three who is always keeping secrets to himself and acting alone, that would be you, Jupe! You thrive on situations to glamorize yourself. Now, you are reprimanding Bob for doing what you always do to us!"

"Okay, okay, I'll explain to you," Bob said. He lay on the floor, clasped his hands under his head and stretched his legs as far away from him as the limited space in the trailer allowed. Then he closed his eyes and breathed evenly.

"You have to understand, fellas," he said quietly. "When Mystery called for the third time on *Late Night*, something struck me really hard. Something in my subconscious went haywire. At first, I couldn't explain to myself why the voice filled me with such fear, and I first had to understand what was going on with me. I could not talk to you about it because I did not know it myself at that time. That's why I left here early last night."

"Go on," Jupe told Bob.

"I went straight home to bed, but I couldn't sleep for a long time. For hours, I stared at the ceiling and racked my brain, which is why this voice kept me so busy. Suddenly I had a realization that made me break out in a cold sweat. My subconscious had reacted so sensitively to the third Mystery call because the voice was already in my subconscious!"

"Huh?" Pete uttered without understanding. "What are you talking about?"

"Clarissa Franklin put me under hypnosis when I went to see her for psychotherapy! Ring any bells?"

"Yes, yes, it makes sense!" Jupiter's eyes began to shine. "No wonder your subconscious reacted immediately when that voice was heard again even after all this time! Such deep hypnosis has an intense and long-lasting effect."

"This is crazy, don't you think?" Bob added. "The hypnotist's voice seems to be imprinted very deeply in me."

"I'd call it fascinating, Bob!" The First Investigator excitedly shovelled a handful of peanuts into his mouth.

“Still, I had to be sure before I could talk to you about it,” Bob continued. “Although the suspicion that she might be involved in this matter is quite absurd, I was convinced that Dr Franklin was in prison. Well, Cotta then told me that the psychotherapist had voluntarily committed herself to a psychiatric ward. So I went there myself.”

“Okay, perhaps I was a bit hard on you, Bob,” Jupiter generously conceded. In doing so, he indulged himself with another portion of peanuts. “I would probably have done the same in your place. Nevertheless, all this news raises a lot of new questions. To me, the most important one seems to be: ‘What is the connection between Kevin Anderson and Clarissa Franklin?’”

“Could you perhaps swallow before you speak further?” Pete called the First Investigator to order. “Because with your mouth full, we understand only half of what you are mumbling!”

Bob rose from the ground and reached into the peanut can as well. He then passed it on to Pete. “Well, you might as well have some of this. I read once that nuts stimulate brain activity.”

“Stop fooling around!” Jupiter intervened. “Mr Anderson was successful in getting Mrs Brighton fired within minutes without notice, even though she had been with the station for over thirty years. And her assumptions about his motive sound plausible.”

“Sure, Juve,” Pete emptied the rest of the peanut can and kicked it into the waste basket with his foot.

“You said that Mrs Brighton wanted to call the police in on this Mystery business,” Bob said. “Mr Anderson prevented that by getting her fired. He must have been worried that she’d get her proposal through to the bosses after all. Then the police would have tracked down Mystery with a trap and interrogated her. So it can be assumed that our radio host would not have liked this at all, because something would probably have come to light that would have got him into a lot of trouble.”

“That’s right, Bob,” Jupiter said. “And that’s why he smuggled the watch into Mrs Brighton’s bag and committed the heinous character assassination. What do you think he’d do to us if he knew we were on the case?”

Pete cringed. “I dare not imagine. And from the looks of it, we have to assume that Kevin Anderson is really devious. This guy is wealthy and influential. For a few dollars, he can easily send a bunch of thugs after us!”

“So we need to come up with a plan for our next move... and I already have an idea!” Jupiter announced.

“Well, I’ll be damned,” Pete remarked. “What is your plan, if I may ask?”

“Since Kevin Anderson will be returning to the psychiatric hospital tomorrow, we will secretly be on his trail,” Juve announced.

“No way,” Bob objected with a disappointed face. “Best Hope is guarded like a fortress. They have security guards posted at the entrance and you have to leave your ID at the reception. We will never get in there unnoticed, and in whatever you want to do, you would have to do it without me. Miss Franklin has got me banned from the building.”

The First Investigator could not be dissuaded from his proposal. “We will still be on Kevin Anderson’s trail when he is at the hospital... and you’re gonna be part of it, Bob.”

“Oh? And how am I going to do that?” Bob wondered.

“That’s easy!” Juve quipped. “I have something here that can help us!”

12. A Favour from the Girls

“All right! Stop kidding us, Jupe!” Bob added. “How are we going to be on Kevin Anderson’s trail when he is at the hospital? I told you that the security there is tight.”

The First Investigator went to the desk, pulled the bottom drawer and took out a small and narrow tin can.

“And in there is something there that will help us?” Bob asked sarcastically.

“Indeed, fellas. Think! Use your brains!” Like a precious treasure, he held the can up high. “We have to be stealthy, because if Kevin Anderson finds out we’re following him, it could be dangerous for us.”

“But we don’t have to worry at all, because as usual, our leader has a plan! Don’t make me laugh. You shouldn’t take the whole situation lightly, Jupiter Jones.”

“I’ll stand by it.” With a mischievous grin, the First Investigator put his hand on the tin can. “The three of us will trail the radio host at the hospital tomorrow afternoon and no one will take any notice of us.”

“And the secret really lies in that can?” Bob doubted.

Jupiter nodded.

“Then stop torturing us and show us that thing!” Pete burst out.

“Take it easy, Pete.” Jupiter tampered with the can in a provocative way. “I almost think... Wait a minute, the lid is stuck.”

“Give it to me. I’ll open it!” Pete eagerly stretched his arm across the desk.

At that moment, the lid sprung open. Jupiter reached into the tin and took out a tiny round metal object on the table. It was about the size of a small button battery.

“Wow!” Bob’s eyes started to light up. “Just brilliant, Jupe! A bug!”

“Exactly. We’re going to fix it on Kevin Anderson. Then we can listen to every word he has to say to Dr Freeman through a receiver. Well, did I promise too much?”

“My respects, Jupe!” praised Pete. “But where did you get this bug? And I don’t see a receiver anywhere near here.”

“One thing at a time,” Jupe said. “In our past, we’ve had several adversaries listening in on us using a bug. You know I don’t throw anything away that might be usable again some day. Now, this tiny microphone will do us a great service. The corresponding receiver was easily assembled with a few parts from a simple radio. I did that last week in just over two hours. At the moment, the receiver is in my bedroom. I have already tried it and got excellent results.”

“Excellent results? What do you mean?” Pete wondered.

With a laugh, the First Investigator exposed his row of teeth. “I placed the bug on the lamp shade in our living room and last week I overheard a discussion between Aunt Mathilda and Uncle Titus about what they wanted to give me for my birthday! If they don’t change their plans at short notice, I can look forward to a super laptop next month!”

“Splendid!” Pete squealed enthusiastically. “I really must borrow this listening device.”

“First, it will hopefully serve us well tomorrow. The acoustic transmission is brilliant!” Jupiter said. “Also, the receiver can easily connect to a recorder so we can record the conversation.”

“There’s one issue, though,” Jupiter continued. “The bug has a transmission range of about 100 metres, so we have to be close by the hospital. Tomorrow, we will have to give ourselves enough time to go there and station ourselves before 4 pm,” Jupiter decided. “Meanwhile tonight, I will get the receiver and recorder in order.”

Despite all the enthusiasm, Bob remained sceptical. “But have you thought about how you might attach this bug on Mr Anderson without him knowing?”

Jupiter remained calm. “Planting foreign objects on a person is not very difficult. Our radio host has already demonstrated this successfully with Mrs Brighton. And we’ve been smart like him for a long time! Hand me the phone book, Pete. I have to ask our client for one more piece of information.”

With five people, the MG of the Second Investigator was used to its maximum capacity the next day at 2 pm. Jupiter sat next to Pete in the passenger seat, while Kelly and Lys, their two friends, had to share the narrow back seat with Bob.

On the way to the radio station, Jupiter gave the girls the instructions again. “Under any circumstances, the most important thing is that you must not be turned away by the doorman. So do not let him tell you that Mr Anderson is not at the station. Mrs Brighton has assured me that he attends the editorial meeting on the seventh floor every day, and it doesn’t end until 3 pm. Even if the doorman gives you trouble, think of something to make it happen.”

Kelly tinkled provocatively with her eyelids. “We will use our most powerful weapon—feminine charm.”

“Don’t overdo it,” Jupiter warned, “else he’ll suspect you’re up to something.”

“Now don’t you worry, boys,” Lys reassured the detectives. “After all, we’re not stupid! Have we ever ruined your investigations? We’ll get to our favourite radio host. When we hand him the bouquet of flowers and ask for a photo of us all together, one of us will attach the bug to his clothes without him noticing. He won’t suspect a thing.”

“So get ready, girls. We’re here.” Pete slowed down, braked, shifted into reverse and steered the MG skilfully into a narrow car park space.

“I place all hope in your skills,” Jupiter warned emphatically. “If you pull this off, we’ll treat you to as much cream cake, ice cream and Coke as your stomachs can hold... but only when the case is closed. With luck, it won’t be long now.”

Lys confidently lifted the pocket camera into the air. “I’m really excited to pose for a photo with Kevin Anderson. The photo will be so good that you’ll hang it up in your headquarters.”

“Okay, okay. Now beat it, you two, time’s running out!” Jupiter crossed both fingers. “We are counting on you!”

The girls got out of the car and rushed off kicking and screaming as if they were on their way to a boy band concert. They turned around the corner towards the radio station building.

“I hope they don’t mess this up!” Pete said. “Everything depends on this action!”

“Fear leads nowhere, Pete.” Bob was in the back seat, stretching his limbs way out. “From now on, fate is in the hands of Lys and Kelly.”

Jupiter threw a nervous glance at the clock on the dashboard. The digital display showed 2:50 pm. The First Investigator began to get fidgety and began to slide around in his seat.

At 3 pm, Bob’s fingernails were scratching restlessly over the seat cover. Still nothing could be seen of the two girls. When the display finally jumped to 3:10, Pete lost his nerve. “Have you ever thought about the consequences for all of us if the two girls are caught up there?”

“If Kelly and Lys don’t keep their mouths shut and they...” Jupiter fell silent and pointed excitedly out the side window. “Here they come! Without the bouquet! That’s a good sign.”

Bob courteously opened the door of the car for the girls. “So? How was it?”

“Look forward to a great photo!” Lys exclaimed. “Everything went like clockwork! We tricked him. That Anderson acted like a vain rooster and even gelled his hair before taking the photo!”

“Then Lys and I put our arms around his shoulders, beamed together into the camera and let the director take a photo of us,” Kelly added.

“And I stuck the bug under his jacket collar without him realizing it,” Lys said.

“Great!” praised Jupiter. “You have truly earned the reward! Now we’ll go to the hospital and wait for him.”

“But not without dropping us off at the cinema first,” Lys protested. “*Scream 4* starts today and we want to be the first to watch it.”

“Can’t we drop you at the bus stop?” Pete asked. “We’re really in a hurry!”

“You’d like that, wouldn’t you, after we did you this favour?” Kelly said. “The cinema is almost on the way. Let’s see if you’re real gentlemen.”

“All right, Kelly, all right!” Pete drove out of the car park, turned around and sped.

During the ride, Lys plucked Jupiter’s T-shirt from behind. “I know that you always act professionally, Juve, but I must urge you to be careful. I only knew Kevin Anderson by his voice, but when Kelly and I were standing in front of him, I had a strange feeling. That man has mean eyes and I felt very uneasy.”

13. False Premonitions

During the drive to the psychiatric hospital, Kevin Anderson had his ears tuned to the music that came out of the loudspeakers of the audio system in his Porsche. The choral singing from the opera *Carmina Burana* was transmitted via the bug to the receiver in Pete's MG.

Fifteen minutes ago, Pete had parked his car in an obscure location within the hospital's visitor car park. Jupiter had set up the receiver and recorder on the back seat of the MG. He had also inserted a cassette into the recorder and waited anxiously for the right moment to press the record button.

The receiver had remained quiet for some time and as soon as it picked up the opera music, Jupiter knew that Kevin Anderson was approaching the hospital. "The guy should be arriving soon," he announced.

A few moments later, the three of them saw the red Porsche entering the visitor car park. All three of them lowered their heads so that Anderson would not see them.

Soon, the choral singing stopped. Shortly afterwards, the engine was switched off. The Three Investigators could see the radio host leaving his car and hurrying into the hospital lobby.

Jupiter checked his watch and found that Kevin Anderson was on time to the minute. It was exactly 4 pm. Now Juve pressed the record button on the recorder. The heels of the shoes echoed on the floor tiles as Anderson went to the reception.

"Hi, Mr Anderson." said a squeaky voice. It was the young woman behind the counter. "Dr Freeman is waiting for you in his office."

The radio host uttered a scornful sound and walked down a long corridor. Then the steps stopped. A discreet knocking sounded. The hinges squeaked when the door was opened.

"Hi, Kevin! I'm glad you're here. Something unimaginable is brewing here."

"I'm aware of that too! Did you take that Mrs Jordan to task?"

"Why don't you sit down?" A chair was moved. Bottles clinked. "What are you drinking?"

"A double whiskey."

The clear acoustics had an oppressive effect on Jupiter, Pete and Bob. The voices from the loudspeakers were transmitted so lifelike that it almost seemed as if Kevin Anderson and Dr Freeman were with them in Pete's MG.

Ice cubes fell clinking into two glasses and a liquid was poured in. The two toasted each other.

"I've almost gone crazy these past two days, Percy. Why haven't you called me back at least once? I left five messages for you at the hotel's reception!"

"I was at the convention during the day," Dr Freeman replied.

"But surely you came back to the hotel in the evening?"

"No." A glass was placed on the table.

"What do you mean?" Mr Anderson asked.

"I took a short trip to San Francisco over the weekend. I had to switch off in between. Anyway, I've been investigating the situation with Mrs Jordan. The results were negative."

“Negative? You don’t even believe that. She was the first Mystery caller. You yourself recognized her voice after I played you the call on tape. You confirmed it for me!”

“Hold on, Kevin!” the doctor corrected. “I just haven’t ruled out a certain similarity. There’s a world of difference. But the results of my examination have not confirmed the suspicion.”

“I need more details if I’m to understand you.”

“I confronted Mrs Jordan directly here in my office this afternoon and played her the recording. Judging by her reaction, she really didn’t recognize herself, especially since the caller was clearly disguising her voice.”

“Why are you suddenly backing out, Percy? Of course, she won’t admit it. But a voice has all the typical traits. It’s almost like a genetic fingerprint. If she denied it to you, she’s probably a brilliant actress who’s in control. I’m surprised you’d fall for that as a specialist in psychiatric matters.”

“You shouldn’t underestimate me, Kevin.” It sounded as if Dr Freeman was pulling up a drawer and taking out papers. “Here, look at this!”

“What is this?”

“The readings from the polygraph. Obviously, I don’t trust my patients one bit, so I subjected Mrs Jordan to an elaborate test.”

Paper rustled again. “These lines don’t tell me anything. What can you tell from them?”

“That Mrs Jordan is not the caller I mistakenly thought she was. When the tape was played and several trick questions were asked, there were no noticeable changes in her pulse rate and temperature. Not even the smallest detail of her brain waves showed that she had anything to do with it. I’m sorry, Kevin, but Mrs Jordan is not connected to that call.”

“This is simply impossible!” Kevin Anderson raised his voice threateningly. “All the calls point unmistakably to what is happening in this hospital! And you should be aware of the fact that you too, will get into a lot of trouble if the matter is discovered! Those who have got onto our nerves are trying to systematically wear us down bit by bit. I suspect that this whole thing will lead to a lousy blackmail. Are we supposed to wait until Mystery makes demands on my live show? Then the press will be at my door in no time and the police will be on my tail!”

“Take another sip, Kevin. It’ll calm your nerves.”

The Three Investigators did not dare to move and focussed on receiver as quiet as a mouse. Jupiter pinched his lower lip like a man possessed.

“We must not be idle,” continued Mr Anderson. “Mystery is aware of all the events. Who whistled the nightingale’s song to her? Maybe Steven talked?”

“He would hardly have been able to do that. Besides, I put him on the polygraph too. The result was negative as well. No, no, the leak must have come from somewhere else.”

“But apart from the three of us, not a soul is privy to it! Have you tried other ways to dig out information from Mrs Jordan? Maybe it was her after all! ‘It was the nightingale, and not the lark.’ It is clear from this quote that she is aware of Steven’s activities. No offence, Percy, but I don’t think we can rely solely on the results of a polygraph. Maybe if you used a little force, just a little, we’d be sure to get the truth out of Mrs Jordan. There’s too much at stake for us to let one of your patients mess it up for us. Don’t forget that I’m paying you a bunch of money every month for your services. I can’t imagine that you can and will do without it so easily. So figure out a damn good way to shut Mystery up because one thing is certain—the leak is somewhere here in this hospital. Your job is to find it and shut it down once and for all... or else we’ll both be in deep water.”

Pete got a chill. Never in his life did he dream he'd hear the radio host talk like that. Bob and Jupiter had also been speechless.

Dr Freeman, on the other hand, remained calm. "I promise to get to the bottom of this as soon as possible. However, I am convinced that Mrs Jordan has no part in this. The woman is not psychologically capable of such acts. And for the past few weeks, she was..." He faltered.

"What's the matter?"

Again a drawer was pulled open and again rustling paper was heard.

"Percy, why don't you keep talking?"

For a few seconds, there was a ghostly silence in the room. Nothing could be heard except the ticking of a wall clock.

"Aren't you gonna tell me what's going on? What are you reading there anyway? And why are you suddenly so pale? Percy!"

"I... I have a hunch, Kevin—a hunch that seems so far-fetched that any editor of a crime novel would clasp his hands over his head and ask for a more plausible explanation."

"Would you please stop beating around the bush and tell me what's going on?"

Instead of giving an answer, Dr Freeman got out of his chair. "Come on!"

The Three Investigators looked at each other questioningly.

"What's going on?" murmured the Second Investigator.

"Quiet, Pete!" Jupiter hissed and put his finger to his lips as a warning.

Steps could be heard from the receiver. The two men left the room and continued walking.

"Where are we going?" Mr Anderson asked.

"Just follow me..." Dr Freeman and the radio host set themselves in motion with quick steps. A strange squeaking sound was heard from a distance, becoming louder as the two men approached the source of the noise.

Bob remembered. "This will be the paternoster—the lift in the hospital. Obviously the oldest type."

"A paternoster?" Pete whispered. "What is that?"

"A passenger lift which consists of a chain of open cabins that move slowly in a loop up and down inside a building," Bob told his friend.

"Shhh..." Jupiter hissed.

"Can't you enlighten me, Percy?" Anderson urged impatiently.

"If my suspicions are correct, Kevin, we're going to pay a little visit to Mystery!"

14. Power Games

The two men entered a paternoster cabin. Unfortunately for The Three Investigators it was not clear whether the men went up or down.

“Who is it, Percy?” Kevin Anderson urged insistently. “Who is it?”

After a few seconds of silence, the paternoster stopped. The two men left the cabin with hurried footsteps. After a short while, they stopped. Without knocking, a handle was pressed. Shortly afterwards, a loud knocking on the door could be heard. There was no response.

“Open the door immediately,” Dr Franklin said.

Nothing seemed to have moved. Then Jupiter, Pete and Bob could clearly hear a bunch of keys being pulled out to unlock a door to gain access to a room.

“Not here...” Dr Freeman said. “I can imagine where. There’s coffee and cake downstairs in the dining room—a convenient opportunity... Sit in that chair, Kevin. I’ll just have a look around.”

“What are you looking for?”

“Any evidence to prove that my suspicions are correct!”

Several minutes passed as the entire room was literally turned upside down. Closets were opened and books flipped through. Again and again, The Three Investigators heard Dr Freeman’s silent cursing. From the sound of the flush, Freeman was now in the bathroom. Shortly afterwards, he lowered himself onto the mattress of the hospital bed as springs of the bed frame squeaked.

“I was hoping we might find something,” Dr Freeman said.

Suddenly footsteps approached from outside. The door was pushed open and someone entered the room.

“How dare you? What are you doing in my room?”

“Miss Franklin!” Bob impulsively exclaimed.

Even now Jupiter admonished his colleagues to absolute silence.

“Shut up and close the door,” Dr Freeman ordered in a sharp voice. “It’s not necessary for everyone to know what we are here to discuss.”

“Don’t order me around,” the psychotherapist replied confidently. “First explain to me clearly what you hope to find here... or what reason is there for making such a mess in my room?”

“It’s her, Percy!” Mr Anderson cried furiously. “I recognize that voice! The third Mystery caller!”

“I’ll handle it, Kevin...” Dr Franklin said to calm down the radio host.

“What are you doing, Dr Freeman?” Suddenly Miss Franklin’s voice sounded suspicious.

“Close the door,” Dr Freeman repeated insistently.

“All right.” The door slammed shut. “Satisfied?”

“I ask the questions. Understand?” Dr Freeman said.

“You are facing a lady. Where are your manners?”

“Don’t try to stall for time, Miss Franklin...” he replied coldly. “You can’t fool me. You have a razor-sharp mind... Most impressive... It’s plain to see that you have a great deal of

romance going on behind that pretty forehead of yours. Now sit down and listen to me!" One chair moved.

"I've reviewed your files, Miss Franklin. We're almost colleagues... or rather, we would have been colleagues, only that they've taken away your psychotherapy practice, and now you're here in Best Hope to be rehabilitated. You're a smart woman. You hope to get your sentence reduced. And besides, a stay in a psychiatric hospital is still more accepted than in a prison."

"That's a vicious insinuation," Franklin remarked. "Are you trying to insult me?"

"Oh no. Oh no, not at all," said Dr Freeman in a hypocritically indignant voice.

"You have a report which clearly states that I suffered from a severe addiction to drugs," Franklin said.

"Oh yes, I read it. It was a terrible thing back then—to put a young person under hypnosis and inject him with an anaesthetic because he had discovered your criminal activities. It would make a good crime novel, Miss Franklin."

Bob gulped when he heard this.

"Are you interested in crime novels?" she asked Dr Freeman pointedly.

"Oh, yes, because it's such a good way to get inside the mind of a criminal." He started pacing slowly up and down the room. "Only certain people have the ability to unlock secrets hidden in the subconscious and give them commands that they cannot remember afterwards. You are one of those people, Miss Franklin. I respect that. Apparently you practise the art of hypnosis here at the hospital as well. Who else here is your patient besides Mrs Jordan?"

"Ten demerit points for you, Dr Freeman," Miss Franklin said. "It took you a surprisingly long time to shift gears." There was a muffled sound, followed by a click from a lighter.

"No smoking in this building! Please put out your cigarette at once."

"Who wants to demonstrate his power to whom? The cigarette stays on... unless you're not interested in what I have to say."

There was another pause. Finally, Dr Freeman said: "So please."

"The Nightingale is very sick," Franklin continued. "You don't have to be a great expert to see that. It has had its wings clipped. I took care of it to find out the reason for its illness. But no matter how hard I tried, the bird would not sing a song. So I tried hypnosis... and lo and behold, amazing things came to light—facts that Mystery has already been whispering into your ear during your broadcast, Mr Anderson." She took a puff on her cigarette.

"What do you want?" the radio host asked bluntly.

"Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars and a certificate!"

The radio host was at a loss for words. "You're... you're insane."

"I would be if I let this opportunity pass me by."

"But... but I don't have that kind of money," stammered Mr Anderson. "You overestimate my income."

"And you underestimate my knowledge, young man," she replied dryly. "Many patients from show business came to my clinic—singers, actors, producers and politicians. I know how much they are paid. So don't appeal to my compassion and don't play the poor church mouse here. You'll only increase my demands and upset me unnecessarily. So be smart and agree to it. You have no choice anyway."

"What kind of certificate are you asking for?" Dr Freeman asked.

"A medical certificate guaranteeing me early release from this hospital. In three weeks at the latest, I want to pack my bags and leave Best Hope a rehabilitated and free woman."

"How am I to do that?" Dr Franklin objected. "I alone cannot make such a decision. As a doctor, you should know that better than anyone."

"Quite so," agreed the psychotherapist. "And so you will use all your contacts and connections to do me this little favour. You have no choice... unless you get me out of the way. But that's a risk even you can't afford to take. Who knows, maybe I have records somewhere that clearly show your criminal activities? After all, a woman in my situation can no longer afford to act without reassurance."

"Ice-cold blackmail," Kevin Anderson muttered, clearly irritated. "What guarantee is there that you won't make any more demands after your release? Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars can be quickly spent."

"I care about my freedom. Money plays a secondary role and is only meant to make my return to civil life a little easier. You have no choice but to accept my word of honour in this case." The psychotherapist made a scornful noise. "I'm sick and tired of living under the same roof with these lunatics. Their presence is killing me. And the hospital food is unbearable. I want to get out of this dump, so I'm going to take my chances. I'll give you three days to arrange my release, Doctor, however you do it... or I'll turn you both over to the police. This is not an idle threat. I mean it. Is that understood?"

Dr Freeman gasped for breath and lowered his voice. "You seem very sure of yourself."

"Indeed... and that's why I'm not backing away from my demands. Furthermore, I demand more humane conditions for the rest of my stay in this hospital and a few little comforts to sweeten my evening hours."

"I'm listening."

"From now on, I'm not gonna get my hands dirty. In other words, from now on, gardening and kitchen work will no longer be my responsibility. Furthermore, the prescribed nap will be removed from my list immediately, and the staff will also have to show me more respect in the future."

"That can be arranged," Dr Freeman generously agreed. "And what did you mean by 'to sweeten your evening hours'?"

"A bottle of red wine every night," Franklin said. "Château Lafite Rothschild... with a carafe, not a toothbrush mug."

"You have taste." Dr Freeman expressed confidence. "I'm sure we can reach an amicable settlement, Miss Franklin... but you'll understand that I have to think this whole thing through again. Your demands are, shall I say, somewhat sudden."

"Three days," warned the psychotherapist emphatically. "And not an hour more. Now leave me alone. The mess you made in my room was unnecessary. It will take hours to put everything back in its place. Get out of here!"

Without another word, the two men left the psychotherapist's room.

"Let's go to my office, Kevin," Dr Freeman suggested to the radio host.

Jupiter, Pete and Bob did not dare to breathe. Bob, in particular, felt a sense of relief when he now knew that he was not wrong to suspect Clarissa Franklin's involvement in this whole affair.

They could clearly hear Dr Freeman and Kevin Anderson entering the paternoster and its rattling movement. Finally, they got out and walked back to the office.

"Pour me another, Percy. That's what I need right now." Bottles and glasses clanked again.

"What do we do now?" Hastily the radio host drank in noisy gulps.

"Keep your nerve, Kevin. I was counting on everything, but not this cold insolence. It's high time we gave our psychotherapist a special treatment."

The radio host breathed a sigh of relief. "For a moment, I thought you wanted to give in."

“That would mean willingly handing yourself over to the executioner,” Dr Freeman said devilishly. “According to her report, Miss Franklin has to deal with a serious drug problem. This fact will now break her neck.”

“How do you see that happening?” Kevin Anderson asked.

“Tomorrow morning, our psychotherapist will be found in her room in a most unfortunate condition,” Dr Franklin said “She will never again be able to articulate herself to others in a rational way... A tragic incident. A drug-addicted patient who secretly tampered with the medicine cabinet and got the dosage wrong. At least that’s how it will look on the outside.”

“Are you trying to kill her?”

“I’m not a murderer,” Dr Freeman replied indignantly. “Of course she’ll live... only she will have no memory of what happened.”

“I would give a lot to be part of this,” the radio host said.

“You’re welcome to attend the ceremony, Kevin. I might even be able to use you there in case I run into difficulties, contrary to all expectations. What time do you have to be at the station later?”

“Not until 10 pm.”

“Well, there you go. It fits perfectly into my schedule. I’m leaving for a dinner appointment at six, and will be back here by eight. By then most of the doctors and nurses have already left, and it is relatively quiet here. So I expect you here in my office at 8:10 pm sharp. I would have made all the necessary arrangements and moved our tiresome friend down to the basement...”

He lowered his voice to an ominous whisper. “To cell thirteen...”

15. In the Padded Cell

Kevin Anderson said goodbye to Dr Freeman, left the psychiatric hospital and drove off in his red Porsche. Again he listened to the sounds of the opera.

Jupiter was the first to break free from the paralysis. "That's about all for the time being." He stopped the recording and switched off the receiver. Then he looked at the clock with concern.

"What are you thinking of doing?" Pete asked.

"We need to get into the hospital before Dr Freeman returns at 8 pm," Jupiter decided.

Pete exclaimed in horror. "It's over. Over and out, Juve! I won't be a party to this!"

"What's got into you, Pete?" Bob wondered at the violent outburst of emotion.

"You know exactly what I mean! Again and again we give in to Juve's demands. We always give in when our leader wants us to go into the lion's den despite all the protests... but now I'm getting out." Pete touched his head in disgust. "We must inform Inspector Cotta! What Kevin Anderson and this Dr Freeman are planning with Miss Franklin borders on murder! With all your courage and sense of justice, Juve, this case is too big for us to handle!"

The First Investigator was not at all impressed by Pete's outburst. "Naturally, we will call in the inspector. But before we do, I will formulate a detailed strategy on how best to proceed."

"How best to proceed? I don't think I'm hearing right!" Pete yelled. "Why can't you put the case in the police's hands and stay totally out of it?"

"Very simple, Pete." Jupiter explained. "If the police stormed the hospital, it wouldn't do anything. After all, we have little evidence and no clue as to what Miss Franklin is trying to pressure them with. In the worst case, the psychotherapist denies everything to the police. Although we have taped the conversation, sound recordings are not considered conclusive evidence in court. Therefore, fellas, we must first make preparations without the police, and we'll spring a trap! The police will only intervene at the last moment."

Pete wiped his wet hands on his jeans. "And how are we going to get into the hospital undetected? According to Bob, there are strict security measures."

"You don't have to worry about that." Bob grinned confidently. "Normally it's Juve who comes up with the idea to save the day. But this time, I have an idea. Just let me do it!"

"Excellent!" praised Jupiter. "We'll go back to Headquarters and then I will call Inspector Cotta and inform him of our plans!"

At 7:10 pm, a red MG came to a stop in front of the psychiatric hospital, from which three young men in blue overalls got out. They each took a package wrapped in plastic from the boot and entered the lobby.

"Hi, we're dropping off the dry-cleaned gowns that weren't ready for delivery yesterday."

"You're late today," wondered the young woman at reception.

"It's our last delivery today," moaned the fattest of them. "We'll be leaving soon!"

"Same here. I'm about to go off too. I'm just waiting to be relieved." The woman smiled and pointed down the hall on the right. "Go to the service entrance, then straight ahead, around the corner and—"

"—Room 17," the fat one said. "Yes, we know. Thank you."

The three young men entered the service entrance naturally, which was only for employees and service personnel. They quickly walked down a long corridor, and as they turned the corner, they breathed a sigh of relief.

"Phew, that went off without a hitch," Pete said.

Bob took the dark sunglasses off his nose and ran them over his back-combed hair. "Thank goodness, Miss Wheeler didn't recognize me. The disguise was sufficient!"

Jupiter squinted at the opposite door. "Room 17... Let's put the packages here and then get to the basement as quickly as possible, fellas. Every minute is precious!"

He pushed the door open with his foot and entered a room in which countless sheets, doctor's gowns and dish towels were neatly folded up on the shelves. To his relief, there was no one in the room.

"Man, luck seems to be on our side," Bob whispered as he placed his package on a wooden table. "It would have been inconceivable if a regular staff member had welcomed us here. Then our cover might have been discovered before we know it!"

The First Investigator kept his cool. "Stay calm. After all, we didn't clear out Aunt Mathilda's linen cupboard for nothing. If anyone checks the packages, they would find duvet covers and pillowcases... but with a flowery overprint!"

"Unload and go!" Bob waved at the door. He threw a quick glance across the corridor. "It's oppressive and really scary here. Not a soul to be seen—no patients, no staff. Where is everybody?"

"I don't want to meet the devil!" Pete muttered.

"The paternoster must be around the corner!" Bob whispered. "You can hear it already. It is so old that the whole modern building must be built around it."

"Wait!" Jupiter warned. "If it is so noisy, we might have to take the staircase. We can't have anybody catching us here."

"Good idea," Bob remarked.

"Let's go!" Jupiter hurried ahead following a sign pointing to the staircase. They found the door to the staircase after turning a corner a short distance from the paternoster. Very quickly they ran down the stairs to the basement. Jupiter opened the door to the corridor and took a peek out. There was nobody in sight.

"I can't see any security cameras, but I am not too sure," Jupiter said. "But we have no time to lose, so we have to take a chance."

Here too, there was an unsettling silence. A pungent smell of disinfectant struck them. Fluorescent tubes on the ceiling radiated a diffuse, cold light onto the worn linoleum floor. Scattered scorch marks could be seen on it.

"Cell thirteen," murmured the First Investigator. Determined, he went ahead.

Pete kept turning around. The fear that any moment a person might appear in one of the paternoster cabins made his pulse beat faster.

"There is no number attached to any of the doors. But somewhere in here must be that cell." Jupiter stopped and pulled a handle at random. It was locked. He walked on.

"Jupe, Pete." Frightened, the two turned around. Bob waved them over to him.

"What's the matter?" Jupe asked.

Silently he pointed to a metal door with a small window. Remotely it reminded him of the door of an oven. It was locked, not with a key, but with a simple thick door bolt.

Jupiter had to stand on his tiptoes to get a glimpse inside. The three-by-three-metre room was illuminated from the inside. The knobbly walls were made of a white, strange plastic. Jupiter's eyes widened.

"May I see something?" Pete pushed Jupiter aside.

But at that moment, the First Investigator had already pushed the bolt aside. With a jerk, he pulled open the door.

"But... but this can't be..." Pete stammered, but that's all he could come up with.

On the floor in front of them was Clarissa Franklin. She was in a padded cell!

16. The Wings of the Nightingale

The psychotherapist could not believe her eyes. “How... how did you get here? I... I have to get out of here,” she stammered. “They... want to inject me with *Transstyrene Diethylamide*... a neurotoxin!” She was so frightened she could hardly speak.

The First Investigator knelt down to her. “You have to hold out in this cell for several more minutes. But we promise you that nothing worse will happen to you!”

“I’ve got to get out of here! I can hardly breathe!” Sweaty faced, she looked at The Three Investigators.

“For goodness’ sake, keep your voice down!” warned Jupiter emphatically.

Pete looked over to the paternoster with concern. One empty cabin after the other came down to the basement but nobody got out.

“The poison... you... you must get me out of here now!” Clarissa Franklin stammered.

“Okay, I’ll figure something out,” Jupiter asked. “But tell me, where does Dr Freeman keep the poison.”

“In his office,” Franklin said. “In a medicine cabinet in this office.”

“And where is his office?” Jupiter probed further.

“Third floor,” Franklin said. “Third floor, Room 344. It’s should be in a small bottle that is labelled *Transstyrene Diethylamide*. That... that is what they want to inject me with because they... because they...”

“Because they do not want to get involved in the demands of your blackmail,” Jupiter completed the sentence. “We know about it. What we don’t know about, however, is what game Kevin Anderson and Dr Freeman are playing here. What criminal offence is behind all this?”

“I can’t tell you that,” Miss Franklin insisted.

“What else have you got to lose?” Pete said to her.

“Pete is right. If you want us to help you, you have to tell us about it now!” Jupe insisted.

The psychotherapist looked at Jupiter with a startled look. “What do you want to know?”

“What secret is the Nightingale hiding?”

“I... I can’t,” it came trembling from her lips.

“Miss Franklin, those two could show up any minute. Then it’ll be too late.” Jupiter warned as Pete took another quick look at the paternoster. Squeaking, the empty cabins made their rounds.

“His brother... it’s his brother.” Her lips were dry. “Kevin Anderson has a brother who’s here in the hospital. He suffers from a severe form of schizophrenia—a mental illness. He’s sick, but he’s a genius.”

“What do you mean?” Bob asked.

“They call him the ‘Nightingale’ here because he sleeps during the day and works on his writing at night. He provides creative inputs into Kevin’s late-night show! In fact, he even writes the texts, sayings, comments and jokes that Kevin Anderson passes off as his own.”

“Are you sure?” Pete asked.

“I’ve been watching Steven, that’s his name, all my time here in Best Hope,” Miss Franklin continued. “I could tell right away that there was something wrong with him. That’s

when I decided to get in touch with him. At first, he was very reserved towards me. But little by little, he began to trust me. Finally, he told me that he was writing scripts. But he refused to tell me what exactly he was working on. I had the impression that something inside him forbade him to talk about it. I also noticed that he was constantly under heavy drugs... That made me curious.” She took a break.

“And then you hypnotized him and learned the truth,” Jupiter assumed.

“So it was. I asked Steven to come to my room with some excuse. Of course, I just wanted to find out what he was up to during the nights. While hypnotized, he told me the truth. I then gave him a suggestion to take away his ability to remember our conversation.”

“You also did this with Mrs Jordan,” Bob told her straight out. “Then you got her and another man to make the calls to *Late Night* as Mystery.”

“That’s what happened,” she admitted.

“I believe I know why you did that,” Jupiter said. “You had to assume that the first caller would not be put on the air a second time, because Mrs Brighton would have recognized the voice immediately. So for the second call, you got a man to make it. For the third call, you had nothing to fear anymore, because the third message to Mr Anderson had to be quite clear. It was also the last call, so you made it yourself.”

The psychotherapist nodded. “I thought I had cleverly disguised my voice,” she confessed. “But that was clearly not good enough because you, Bob, recognized it.”

—Which you vehemently denied to me, Miss Franklin!” he replied furiously. “You couldn’t resist trying to make me feel guilty by doing the tear-drop thing.”

“What choice did I have?” Miss Franklin said.

“In any case, now Mystery’s utterances make comprehensible sense,” Bob concluded. “The Shakespeare quotation in the first call is now clear. It said that Kevin Anderson owed his career to the Nightingale. We found out that his late-night show was a big flop in the beginning and that Kevin met with his brother more often and discussed the show with him during that time... So now we know that the show’s concept changed with Steven’s reformulated scripts.”

“The second call was ‘Thirteen, fourteen, seventy-eight. You know who makes you great!’” Bob continued. “When I enquired about you at the reception during my first visit, Miss Wheeler at the reception mentioned the patient number of a certain Patricia Messway —‘thirteen, fourteen, twenty-five’. The numbers you mentioned, Miss Franklin, were the patient number of Mr Anderson’s brother. And the purpose of the call was to remind Mr Anderson that Steven was the one who made him great.”

“So it is,” Franklin confirmed.

“And finally, Miss Franklin, the quote adapted from Cinderella summarizes everything!” Bob concluded.

“We also noticed during *Late Night* that Mr Anderson read most of his dialogues from crib sheets,” Jupiter said. “But even if these texts are written by his brother, I do not see in them a criminal offence worthy of blackmail with such high demands.”

“You are well-informed.” The psychotherapist closed her eyes in protest. “And that’s why I won’t say anything more until you let me out of this cell!”

“Just answer one more question,” Jupiter insisted. “Then we’ll make sure that Dr Freeman and Mr Anderson stay away from you forever and you’ll have peace of mind from them in the future.”

Nervously, she moved her head back and forth, and after a pause, she finally said: “All right.”

“For what reason and in what way was the Nightingale’s wings clipped?”

17. Under Lock and Key

The hands on Jupiter's watch were at 7:28 pm. Dr Freeman was to return to his office by 8 pm. To Miss Franklin's horror, Jupiter had locked the door of the padded cell again and left her alone in this uncomfortable room.

The Three Investigators hurried to the staircase and ran up quietly to the third floor. Very slowly, Jupiter opened the door to the corridor and took a peek out.

"I can't see any security cameras here either," Jupiter said. "Let's go."

They quietly stepped out. The corridor was dimly lighted, but was sufficient for them to see the room numbers. They know that on the right, around the corner was the paternoster. On the left were rooms lined up on both sides of the corridor, just like a hospital.

They went left and hurried down the corridor. Not a sound could be heard, even the sound of their footsteps was swallowed by the thick grey carpet. No one seemed to be working on this part of the floor—no telephone ringing, no computer keyboard clicking, it was dead quiet.

It was easy to search when they know the room number. Within a short while, they found Dr Freeman's office just after turning a corner. There was no light coming out from the gap at the bottom of the door.

"Quick, Pete," Jupiter urged. "Work on the door!"

Without hesitation, Pete took a look at the lock and took his lock picks out of his pocket. "Shouldn't be too much of a problem here," he quipped and selected a lock pick. He stuck it in the keyhole, turned the tool around for a few seconds and grinned mischievously as the door opened with a soft squeak.

"I'll go in with Pete," Jupiter turned to Bob. "Bob, you stay out here and be on the look out in case Dr Freeman comes back."

"Great!" Bob said and went back to the corner to watch the paternoster.

Jupiter turned on his flashlight and shone around the room. In the middle was a large desk with files and documents. On the left was a bookshelf filled with thick books and files. Then his gaze fell into the corner of the office and his eyes lit up. There it was—a glass refrigerated medicine cabinet.

Jupiter led the way and approached the cabinet. He shone his flashlight into the cabinet and he could see various bottles of different sizes there. Right down at the bottom shelf was a tinted bottle with the label '*Transstyrene Diethylamide*'.

"Bull's eye!" Jupe whispered, and he tried to open the cabinet. It was locked.

"Pete," Jupe said, "It's another job for you!"

"Great!" It took Pete another half a minute before he opened the cabinet.

Jupiter took the medicine bottle in his hands and examined it from all sides. He thought about it feverishly.

A minute later, Jupiter and Pete came out of Dr Freeman's office. Bob was still on the look out and he gave them the okay sign. Pete locked the door and The Three Investigators rushed back to the stairwell, and ran down to the basement.

Out in the basement corridor, Bob checked the time and it was 7:45 pm. They made it back in time before Dr Freeman returned to his office.

In the meantime, Pete had opened one of the dozen doors with his lock picks. They found themselves in a stuffy chamber, in which all imaginable cleaning utensils were stored. Keeping the door ajar with a narrow gap, they took turns to watch the paternoster, the corridor, and cell thirteen.

“What are we gonna do when they come down, Jupe?” Pete asked.

“If they do what we expect them to do, then we’d catch them red-handed,” Jupiter replied. “Meanwhile, we just have to wait.”

There, they waited a little past 8:20 pm. Suddenly, they flinched. In one of the cabins, two men got out of the paternoster. They approached the padded cell with determination.

Dr Freeman was wearing a white coat. The black full beard made his narrow face look somewhat demonic. Jupiter wouldn’t have been surprised if two devil horns had suddenly grown out of his head. With his big clumsy hands, he pushed the bolt aside and opened the door. Then both men went into the room and closed the door.

“Get ready fellas,” Jupe said. “We’ll confront them when they come out.”

Whatever happened in the room next, nothing could be heard. The cell was well-padded and in some sort of way, made it relatively sound proof.

Five minutes past. Then The Three Investigators heard the door opening. For The Three Investigators, this was the signal to go on the offensive. They saw Kevin Anderson coming out first, followed by Dr Freeman. Just as Freeman locked back the door, Jupiter, Bob and Pete stepped out into the corridor.

“Good evening, gentlemen.” Courageously, the First Investigator took a step forward.

Kevin Anderson startled and got all the colour out of his face. “What are you doing here?”

“You can’t think of a smarter question, can you?” Bob countered. “You yourself praised our detective skills on your show, in front of an audience of 10 million people. We’ve discovered Mystery, and now we want to save you from making a fool of yourself.”

“Who are you three, and what are you doing here?” The doctor’s eyes narrowed.

“The Three Investigators,” the radio host told Dr Freeman. “America’s youngest detectives.”

“Could you repeat that again?” The doctor’s eyes narrowed.

“What? Are you hard of hearing?” All of a sudden, Pete’s fear was gone.

Kevin Anderson buried his hands in his pockets. “We’re dealing with The Three Investigators,” he told Dr Freeman. “They stick their noses into anything that reeks of mystery. I believe Mrs Brighton has something to do with this. She is gonna regret this!”

“Shut up!” the doctor called the radio host to order. A light smile played around the corners of his mouth. “So the three of you figured out this Mystery, huh? Very remarkable, boys. You seem to know your stuff. I can’t for the life of me explain how you got into this hospital, but I’m sure you’ve already discussed it at length with my special patient here.”

“Unfortunately we haven’t had the chance to do that yet, sir,” Jupiter lied without blushing. “We have only found out that the person behind Mystery’s calls on *Late Night* is Miss Franklin. Bob recognized her voice. He was himself one of her patients some time ago and has found out that she is here in this hospital. So we decided to pay a visit to the psychotherapist to interview her about the strange comments on the radio show.”

“Now? At this hour?” the radio host was suspicious.

Dr Freeman plucked his beard. “You are trespassing in a restricted area of this hospital, and so you have already committed a crime.”

“We knew from the beginning that we had to trespass if we wanted to question Miss Franklin.” Pete also brought the untruth to his lips without batting an eyelid.

“Good of you to admit that,” the doctor said. “Well, I have no interest in what you have uncovered. What is important to me is that you have no business in this hospital and I have to report you to the authorities.” With that, he put his hand into his pocket and pulled out a gun and pointed it at The Three Investigators.

Pete and Bob hesitated but Jupe remained cool.

The doctor then pulled out a bunch of keys from his coat pocket and headed for a nearby door. Using a key, he rummaged around the lock. He opened the door, turned to The Three Investigators, and said with a friendly gesture: “Into this room...”

“What are you going to do to us?” Pete asked.

“I am locking you up before I report you to the authorities for trespassing,” Dr Freeman said. “So please... Go into this room.”

“Come on, fellas.” Jupiter took heart and went on ahead, followed by Bob and Pete. The door slammed shut and the key was turned from outside in a flash. It was pitch dark inside.

“What are we gonna do now?” Pete burst out.

“Quiet Pete!” Jupiter said and searched his pockets. “Damn, does anyone have a flashlight? A lighter would be helpful. I’d love to be able to see something.”

Pete banged his fists against the door. “Let us out! You won’t get away with this! Open the door!”

“Don’t waste your precious energy, Pete! We won’t be in here for long.” Jupiter tried to get his eyes used to the darkness. However, nothing but darkness surrounded him.

“This is what a blind man must feel like,” Bob casually remarked. “I wonder if I could ever get used to it.”

Suddenly they heard a short, shrill yell. A door slammed shut and at the same moment, loud voices were heard. “Stay where you are and don’t move from this spot! You’re under arrest!”

“It’s Inspector Cotta!” Jupiter exclaimed. Now he too was pounding on the door. “We’re here, Inspector! Let us out!”

The Three Investigators did not have to wait long. Within seconds, they were freed from the dark room. With six officers, the inspector had stormed the basement and had Dr Freeman and Kevin Anderson handcuffed.

“Whew... I gotta admit, that was close.” Jupiter wiped his wet forehead.

“Don’t worry,” replied the inspector confidently. “My men and I stormed the hospital quietly half an hour ago. We were hiding, waiting for the right time to strike!”

Dr Freeman put on an innocent face. “What is going on here? What crime are we accused of?”

The First Investigator folded his arms and said in a stern voice: “It is about Mr Anderson’s brother, Steven, who is a passionate and creative writer. He is known as the ‘Nightingale’ among his fellow patients here. For months, you, Dr Freeman, have knowingly been giving inappropriate drugs to Steven Anderson to stimulate his writing creativity. The reason is that he writes the texts for Kevin Anderson to pass off as his own on his *Late Night* show. It has gone on to the extent that Steven is severely dependent on the drug, mentally and physically, in order to continue with his writing.”

“Inappropriate drugs? You watch your mouth, young man!” Dr Freeman cried. “Steven Anderson is a patient in this reputable hospital. Who are you to question what we prescribe to him? We only administer medications that are suitable for his condition! I’ll have you arrested for slander!”

Inspector Cotta made a serious face. “What do you know of the consequences of this drug, Jupiter?”

The First Investigator pointed to the padded cell. “I think Miss Franklin should tell you that herself.”

“I’m afraid that won’t be possible,” Dr Freeman said.

“What do you mean?” Jupiter asked.

Dr Freeman’s eyes began to sparkle. “Tonight, Miss Franklin suffered a fit of rage. I had to take her into protective custody. This is not unusual in her case as these spasms are quite common. But just now, in my office, I was horrified to discover that my medicine cabinet had been broken into. I’m afraid our drug-dependent patient has relapsed and injected herself with a dangerous nerve toxin called *Transstyrene Diethylamide*. What I mistakenly thought was a relatively harmless fit of raving madness is actually the effect of this drug. I think the poor woman is beyond help...”

With a jerk, Inspector Cotta unlocked the door to the padded cell and freed Miss Franklin. Slurring, with a blurred look, the psychotherapist staggered out into the corridor.

Dr Freeman looked at her with concern. “How could you do this to yourself, Miss Franklin? You have such a strong personality and a well-established character...”

The psychotherapist emitted incomprehensible, babbling sounds.

“I’m afraid this witness will be useless in court, Inspector. What more can she tell a judge?” Kevin Anderson seemed confident of victory. “If ever a trial should ever come to order, who would believe these three teenage boys? Moreover, what’s wrong with this drug which is supposedly given to my brother every day?”

Miss Franklin stepped forward energetically and took the floor. “That drug is an amphetamine that was formerly used as a strong sedative. However, it has been banned for years as it is known to cause serious damages to the human body, especially liver, kidney and heart failure. Unless the drug is stopped immediately, Steven Anderson will be dead within a year!”

Dr Freeman was about to faint. “How... how can this be happening? I... I...”

“... You injected her with harmless tap water which I had exchanged for the poison as a precaution,” the First Investigator beat him to it.

Miss Franklin built herself up in front of the radio host and the doctor. “You didn’t care what you did to the Nightingale. Your brother brought you great fame, Mr Anderson, and made you a rich man. With that money, you bribed Dr Freeman to continue to administer the poison.”

The doctor and the radio host were shell-shocked and remained speechless.

Miss Franklin breathed deeply and continued: “Steven is clueless. He is not to blame. He feels at home in this hospital. As long as he gets his drug and could write, he is happy. That’s all he wants. He needs help badly... I, on the other hand, am ashamed of myself. I’ve tried to capitalize on this story by blackmailing you two.”

“Well, I guess that settles everything.” Inspector Cotta grabbed Jupiter’s shoulder in a friendly manner. “By the way, you can turn off your mobile phone in your shirt pocket. The communication worked perfectly! I was able to follow everything clearly!”

18. Mrs Brighton has a Few Questions

American Vegetable, a newly opened restaurant in Rocky Beach that offered only vegetarian food, was the place where The Three Investigators had arranged to meet Mrs Brighton the next afternoon.

The elderly lady was visibly relieved. With a grateful smile, she handed the menu to Jupiter, Pete and Bob. "Just choose what you want and eat what fits in your bellies. This is my treat for you!"

She didn't have to tell the boys twice. Jupiter chose the vegetable meatballs with a hearty garlic sauce; Pete, a big salad with cheese strips; and Bob, a falafel plate with sesame paste. Mrs Brighton, on the other hand, was content with a glass of tomato juice.

Only after everyone had placed their order with the waiter did the chubby lady take a deep breath, leaned back and relax. "You can't imagine how relieved I was when Mr Wilder called this morning and, after a thousand apologies, asked me to take my place in the station again this very evening. Kevin Anderson may be in prison, but a new radio host is taking over *Late Night* and will be hosting the show at 11:10 this evening."

"The show must go on!" Pete triumphed loudly. "This criminal has brought this upon himself. Nothing succeeds like success!"

"All right." Mrs Brighton rubbed her hands. "I don't believe in gloating, but I think in the case of Mr Anderson, we can make an exception. By committing character assassination, he has jeopardized my humble existence. At my age, it's hard to find a new job."

The First Investigator calmly waved away. "Basically, we have to be grateful to Mr Anderson for that nasty trick he pulled with the watch."

"Are you out of your senses, Juve?" Bob ranted indignantly. "What do you mean by that?"

"Think about it, fellas," Jupiter clarified. "If Kevin Anderson hadn't tried to get Mrs Brighton off the station in that sneaky way, she would never have given us the assignment to shed light on this dark matter. In the end, he tripped himself up with his smear campaign."

"We know from Inspector Cotta that Anderson constantly wriggled like an eel during the interrogation and was only prepared to make a confession in a roundabout way," Bob told the astonished lady.

"Perhaps he did not have any crib sheets to read from!" Pete interrupted with a laugh.

Bob continued: "He was reluctant to admit that he had secretly smuggled the boss's watch into your handbag. But in the end, there was no getting around him confessing."

"And how did he do it?" she asked with interest.

"It didn't take much effort on his part, ma'am," Jupiter took over the explanation. He impatiently watched out for the waiter as he slowly became hungry. "By chance, Anderson found the boss's watch in the men's room where he had earlier took off at the sink and left behind. Anderson simply timed the moment when you went to the bathroom. Then he quickly sneaked to your desk and put the watch into your handbag."

Mrs Brighton smiled, but soon her face took on serious features again. "What will happen to his brother Steven now? What about the lethal drug that ruthless Dr Freeman gave him? Is there any chance of rescue?"

“We don’t have to worry about that,” Jupiter was able to reassure her. “Kevin Anderson has claimed that he did not know that the drug would eventually kill his brother, so it was all down to Dr Freeman. Fortunately, the daily doses were not administered as high as initially feared. Although Steven’s body has been severely affected by the harmful drug, he will not suffer any permanent damage.”

“What’s going to happen to Miss Franklin?” Mrs Brighton asked. “After all, it was she who was behind this incredible scandal.”

“... And wanted to enrich herself with blackmailing methods,” Bob added. “I’m quite sure that nothing will change for her. I suppose that her stay at Best Hope will now last a little longer than originally planned. Actually, the situation is very complicated with the three culprits and the police are still carrying out investigations along with experts on the matter.”

“Do you realize that you’re about to be very famous?” Jupiter looked at Mrs Brighton questioningly.

“What do you mean?” the old lady wondered.

“The arrest of Kevin Anderson is currently the number one topic of discussion,” Jupiter continued. “If the reporters find out that it was you who put him behind bars, you won’t have a moment’s peace!”

“What about us?” Bob remarked. “This could also mean that we don’t have to worry about getting future cases!”

“Yeah, sure!” Pete gasped. “I can’t wait to see what we’ll get for the next hundred cases!”